



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

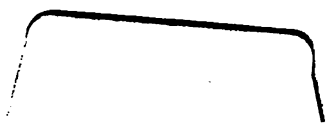
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07484248 9



NBO
DAVIA

1160
1161



GLEASON'S SERIES OF PRIZE TALES, No. 1.

THE

KNIGHT OF THE SILVER CROSS:

OR,

HAFED, THE LION OF TURKESTAN.

A Tale of the Ottoman Empire.

BY EDGAR W. DAVIES, JR.

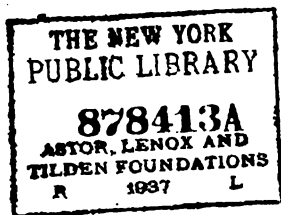
FOR WHICH THE ONE THOUSAND DOLLAR PRIZE WAS AWARDED.

BOSTON:

F. GLEASON'S PUBLISHING HALL,

CORNER OF COURT AND TREMONT STREETS.

1849.



Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1849,
BY F. GLEASON,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.

THE
KNIGHT OF THE SILVER CROSS.

CHAPTER I.

*The travellers' return. The knight of the Silver Cross.
His tale of adventure. The maniac of the tombs. A
disappearance.*

A BEAUTIFUL evening it was, soon after the summer of the year 1299 had passed away, and the autumnal clouds began to hover over the city and suburbs of Palmyra. The surrounding fields were covered with the shining yellow grain, ripe for the sickle, and waving in the gentle breeze, which now and then passed over its surface, and then, after sighing among the tops of the many tall old palm trees that raised their lofty heads towards the sunset sky, seemingly in sorrow at leaving a scene so beautiful and pleasant, took its reluctant departure for the chilly regions of the wintry north, laden with the flowery sweets of the torrid zone.

The evening was far advanced into the silent night, the silvery moon shone brightly in the heavenly firmament, and all nature was at peace. The weary peasant

rested from his toil, and laying aside scythe and vine-hook, sought repose in soothing slumber; not a sound disturbed the tranquillity that reigned around, save the dulcet music floating softly in the air from within the guarded precincts of the palace court and gardens.

Hardly had the signal light announcing the midnight hour blazed forth from the watch-tower of the castle garrison, when a band of travellers, well armed and equipped, slowly descended the side of one of the tomb-covered hills which surround the city along the highway that led to the western gate. It consisted of seven persons, a father, his son, and five servants. The first was a man on whose cheeks the heats of sixty summers had left their bronzing traces, and, though an aged man, Arnot Cretolius seemed hardly past his prime, for his step was as firm, and the glance of his eye as proud, as in the days of youth.

The son, Everard Cretolius, was a tall, well-formed young man of about three-and-twenty years; his figure was symmetry itself; his eyes, of a very dark blue, were extremely expressive, and his fair skin and auburn hair contributed, with the most beautiful features, to form a perfectly irresistible whole.

They were now on their return from a tour in foreign lands, having travelled throughout nearly the whole of the then civilized European world, and been absent from home about three years. Their dress and appearance betokened them to be of the highest order of Palmyrene nobility, and the stars and crosses glittering on their breasts, proved that they had seen not a little of active and successful warlike service.

‘My father,’ said Everard, ‘how glorious the city looks in this flood of gentle light, with its innumerable

domes and cupolas, temples and towers; and see the palace of our king, with its gilded roof and marble colonnades standing on the hill, like a guardian spirit watching the destinies of the nation, and trying to avert each threatened danger. O, my father, is it not pleasant once more to view the city of our birth, after our sojourn in the land of the stranger; once again to see our beloved home, where the hours of infancy and youth were passed even to manhood!

‘It is indeed pleasant, my dear son,’ replied Lord Cretolius; ‘but remember that I look on it with different feelings from you. It is true, that I see before me the scenes of my childish joys, but I see also the arena of my ambitious hopes and varied successes and disappointments. I think of the passions that have reigned in my bosom, alternately elevating or depressing my spirits, with all their necessary attendants of conflicting joy or woe. I have loved, and had my love rewarded with the hand of the object of my affections; I have struggled for fame, and have won lasting honor for the name which I leave, that you may add fresh laurels to its bright renown. My voice has been heard in the councils of my country, and my arm has wielded for her sake the keen-edged scimitar, and alike, in senate chamber or in festive hall, on the field of battle or in the camp, at home or abroad, wherever it has been my chance to wander, either on land or sea, each thought has still been true to her interests and glory. O, Palmyra, beautiful queen of the East, how many brave hearts, how many noble ones are bound up in thee, thou pride of Syria! Long may thy ancient banner spread its beautiful folds to the southern breeze, defying alike the malice of Moslem and Arab foe.’

The old man ceased speaking, and the group silently proceeded forward. The road they had passed, for some distance, was strewn with sand to the depth of several inches, by the laborers who had been engaged in repairing it a short time before, to smooth away the roughness of the new pavement, so that their horses' feet made scarcely any noise, as they sank in the sand to their ankles with each step.

This circumstance prevented them from hearing the approach of a horseman from behind, whose coal black steed, of giant proportions, bore him with such rapidity along the difficult way, as to enable him to overtake the travellers ere they had half descended the side of the hill, and while they were yet a mile from the city gate.

From his dress, a stranger would have supposed him to have been a Saracen chieftain; but could you have rent the silken folds of his disguise, you would have seen beneath his garments the ponderous breast-plate and shining armor of a knight, and on his left shoulder a silver cross, the symbol of his order, worked in the coat of mail.

Though upon his head was jauntily set a scarlet turban, yet beneath it he wore a tight-fitting skull-cap of wrought steel, fully sufficient to have done him service in the hour of peril, had his real character been discovered by the wild Arab tribes through whose country he had just passed.

The first intimation Lord Cretolius and Everard received of his presence, was an exclamation of delight at the beautiful prospect spread out at their feet: 'You did not exaggerate when you described to me the magnificence and splendor of your city, my Lord

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
L



Sudden appearance of the Knight of St. John to the dighted travellers. See page 9

Cretolius. It is charming—sublime! Indeed, this view would well repay me for the dangers through which I have passed on my way hither, even had I hopes of no other reward.'

The travellers turned suddenly, in delighted surprise, at hearing the deep intonations of that well-remembered voice, and as the moonlight fell full on the massive though beautiful features of the knight of St. John, Everard exclaimed:

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

'Why, did we not leave you in Cyprus? Methought you intended to tarry there till you had heard farther of the movements of the eastern sultans, but since you are here, we are glad to have an opportunity of returning the civilities you showered upon us while we tarried with you in Cyprus. What news have come to your hearing since then?'

'That which I have heard is from good authority,' replied the knight, 'but too lengthy and too important to be discussed here, in the open air, where some knave of a Turcoman spy might chance to hear. Suffice it to say, for the present, that I come on a special mission to your royal master, and right happy shall I be to accept of your proffered hospitalities while I remain in Palmyra.'

'But how have you managed to come thus far, alone and unattended, through the innumerable dangers which must have beset your path? Surely this Saracen dress is not a sufficient protection,' said Lord Cretolius.

'Luckily,' answered Sir Percy D'Arville, the knight, 'I understand to perfection the Arab tongue, having

learned it during my unwilling sojourn in Egypt for the space of two years, where I was taken prisoner some ten years since, in the course of an unsuccessful expedition of the knights. Besides, you know the Arabs tremble at the sight of the red turban which distinguished the body-guard of the Saracen sultan, whose character for valor and ferocity is too well known among the tribes, to subject one of their number to either question or insult. As a chieftain of the red turban I have been feasted and sped on my journey by the sheiks, and a frown from me was sufficient to awe into silence every questioner.'

'But have you not been detected once, in the course of your journey?' asked Everard.

'Never, except in one instance,' answered D'Arville. 'A few miles back, beyond the mountains, at the tent of an Arab sheik, with whom I took the evening meal, my silken doublet accidentally caught in a piece of table-furniture, and was drawn open for a moment. The two sons of the sheik, who were directly opposite me, noticed the armor beneath my vest, which their quick eyes instantly discovered was not of Saracen make, and their suspicions were evidently aroused.

'By the time the meal was concluded, my horse was brought to the tent, and fearing the young men would cause my dress to be examined, I whispered to the sheik a request that they might accompany me a mile or two on my way. Of course, the word of an Arab father is law to his children, and at his order they mounted their steeds and rode behind me, often whispering to each other as they went.

'After a while, having left the tents of the tribe far behind, I told the young men I could dispense with

their farther services, whereupon they turned as if to leave me, but hardly had I resumed my journey when a lance whizzed past my ear and buried itself in the sand. I cast my eye over my shoulder, and was just in time to evade the blow of a scimitar, wielded by one of the Arabs, by stooping my head quickly. Had I been a moment later the sharp steel would have been tinged with my life-blood.

‘The next instant I drew my sword from its sheath, and with a single downward blow cleft the traitor to the middle. The other, alarmed at the fate of his brother, turned and fled homewards. Since then, my noble charger has borne me gallantly forward to your desirable presence, where I am beyond the reach of pursuit.’

‘That was indeed a narrow escape,’ said the elder Cretolius, ‘and I am rejoiced that your quickness and watchfulness enabled you to defeat the treacherous design of the Arab, and give him his due punishment. But how long after we left Cyprus did you commence your journey?’

‘On the next morning,’ responded D’Arville, ‘I received a notice from the commander of our order in Cyprus, requesting me to repair to his castle, and he would inform me of the particulars of the mission on which he wished to send me, and confer on me the necessary powers for its completion. Finding my errand was to bring me hitherward, I exerted myself in making preparations; I was enabled to start the second day after, and pressed rapidly forward, hoping to overtake you, which I would have done before had I not missed my way in the mountainous region bordering the sea.’

The travellers were so intently engaged in conversation, that they did not notice a strange form creeping among the tombs ahead of them with stealthy pace. This form was that of a maniac, whose gigantic height and colossal frame gave promise of immense strength; his beard and hair were long and tangled, his countenance blackened by exposure to heat and tempest, and disfigured with scars upon his cheeks and forehead—the traces of the desperate valor he had exhibited in warring with the Moslem in his early youth. His brawny limbs were bare, the only covering upon his body consisting of the skin of some wild beast, fastened around him by cords.

The maniac crouched behind a tombstone at the road-side, and as the travellers approached, he muttered in a deep tone to himself.

‘Ha! ha! a Saracen comes—he comes to glut my vengeance. I will soothe my soul with his blood, and my knife shall drink the purple stream of his life. Now, wretch, now! for my wife, for my child—revenge—revenge.’

He sprang from his hiding-place with a wild, unearthly scream, which rang around like the voice of a demon, and with eyes from which the fire of madness flashed, he glared for a moment on the face of the knight, and then, while the charger of the latter reared in affright, he dragged the powerful chevalier from his saddle as if he had been a child, and disappeared with him among the neighboring tombs.

For an instant, Lord Cretolius and his son halted in silent amazement, but then, raising a horn which hung at his back to his lips, Everard blew three loud alarm-notes, and then ordering his servants to follow, gave pursuit to the fugitives.

The next minute the quick tramp of horses' hoofs was heard along the stony highway below, and a troop of the king's body-guard soon appeared, headed by a young lieutenant. The latter gazed wistfully at the aged nobleman, who had been left alone in the road, and then, springing from his horse, exclaimed, as he kissed the wrinkled hand held out to him:

'Welcome, welcome, my Lord Cretolius, to your home. I am overjoyed at the sight of my more than father. But why these alarm-notes?'

'Wait not for civilities, but follow my son and servants in pursuit of the maniac Marontius. He has just carried off by force one of our party, an envoy from Cyprus, and I fear will kill him, ere he can be rescued.'

Without another word, the lieutenant and his party dashed off in the direction pointed out by Lord Cretolius, their long plumes floating behind in the wind, and their polished armor glittering in the moonlight, and soon disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

The ruined tomb of king Icarus. The pursuit. The knight in danger. The rescue. Everard's story. The knight's chivalric vow.

DISTANT from the road a quarter of a mile, stood a large ruined mausoleum, the roof of which was supported on each side by a wall, and in front by six handsome columns of Grecian marble, wrought in most exquisite style. Though much dilapidated by the flight of time, it still bore unmistakable traces of the beauty it anciently exhibited, when, centuries before, it had been erected over the last resting-place of one of the olden kings of Palmyra.

This relic of ancient art served as a cell to the maniac Marontius, who passed much of his time at night, sitting upon its roof, watching the starry heavens far above, and the sleeping city far beneath—taking his rest by day within its arched recesses. Hither, then, he bore his prisoner, and hither the lieutenant, who was familiar with the habits of the wild ranger, instantly proceeded with his troop.

The knight had struggled long and manfully against his captor, but the strength of madness, which is almost incredible, enabled the maniac to pinion his arms, and bear him quickly to the mausoleum, where he placed him upon a ruined altar which was near. Raising a glittering dagger over the head of his victim, he exclaimed :

‘ Here have six of thy accursed race, blood-thirsty Saracen, perished beneath my avenging arm, and I have sworn never to rest till thrice seven have washed out the memory of past wrongs with their blood. *Here!* ha, ha! yes, it was here I last saw my wife and child; here—struggle away, wretch, it is sport to me to see your vain efforts—they cry unto me from the grave for vengeance! Yes, yes, I will strike for you, dear departed ones, I—die, Saracen, die!’ he screamed as he struck the dagger with such tremendous force on the bosom of his captive, that the steel was shattered to pieces in his grasp.

For a moment he seemed surprised, and stood motionless; but then, stooping to the ground, attempted to raise a broken statue, with which to crush the knight, when he suddenly found himself nearly surrounded by the lieutenant’s troop. With an angry shriek of disappointment the maniac darted away.

‘ A Saracen!’ cried a stalwart trooper, ‘ we had not need to risk breaking our necks by riding among these tombs to save the life of one of those knaves. I’faith, for my part, I think we had better leave him where he is, for that blow the madman struck must have given his soul flight.’

‘ I am no Saracen,’ said D’Arville, ‘ but a true and loyal knight of the order of St. John. Therefore

unloose me quickly, and let me lie no longer here as a sheep for the slaughter.'

'Surely,' said the trooper, as he dismounted and cut the cords which bound the captive's arms, 'surely you must have a charmed life, or by some magic art control the issues of life or death.'

The knight, without heeding the latter remark, thanked the trooper for his service, and placed in his hand a silver coin, saying:

'By my halidom, this disguise of mine is so much torn and disordered by the maniac's rough usage, that I may as well be rid of it.'

Suited the action to the word, he tore off the silken folds of his outer dress, scattered them in shreds to the wind, and stood before them in his proper character—that of a knight of the grand cross of his order.

At this point Everard and his men joined the group, and while the warmest congratulations at his escape were showered upon the knight, the whole cavalcade took their way back to the road, where they fell into line behind Lord Cretolius, and trotted gaily, with ringing hoofs and rattling arms, along the stony pathway into which they now emerged. As the knight and Everard rode on either side of the old noble, the former remarked:

'Methinks yon maniac should be confined; it is dangerous to allow him thus to wander about, falling on whom he will. He told me that he had already slain six upon that tomb, and that I was to be the seventh of the accursed race of the Saracens, whose blood should help to satiate his vengeance.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Lord Cretolius, 'I never heard of his having sacrificed more than two, who were

brothers, one of whom rashly sought and attacked him to revenge the death of the other. At all events, he harms none but those whom every true Palmyrene hates, and they secretly rejoiced at the destruction of those two!

‘And so do I, for the knights of St. John are sworn enemies to the Moslem, and my warmest wish is that all the ruined tombs in Syria may be inhabited by just such right-minded madmen. But what meant he when he called upon the spirits of his departed kindred, saying he would sacrifice me to their shades?’

‘The answer to your question includes a sketch of his early life,’ said Lord Cretolius, ‘and as I am too tired to converse much, my son Everard will please us by giving you the tale. It will serve to beguile the time which must elapse ere we reach the gate.’

‘I shall be pleased to hear it,’ said D’Arville, ‘and, in fact, after my adventure I am very curious upon the subject.’

‘Well, then,’ said Everard, ‘if you will honor me with your attention, you shall hear it as it has been related to me, for at the time the events of the story happened, I was but a child, and too young to heed them.’

‘Marontius, in his early youth, was a private soldier in the royal guard, but by his good conduct and bravery, aided by his prowess in arms, he attracted attention, and by the royal favor rose gradually, until he attained the rank of a commander in the first legion, and with about a thousand men was placed as the pretor of the western wall and gate. This position he held for five years, till the loss of his wife and child drove him crazy. His wife was the only daughter of

the noble Artanius, whom he first met in one of her customary walks without the gate, or upon the side of the hill. In fact, scarcely a day passed that he did not see her, and his polite salutes and her smiles soon paved the way to intimate acquaintance, which gradually warmed into deep, devoted love.

‘He asked her of her father in marriage, but although of a noble but ruined family, his poverty caused him to be rejected and spurned by the proud Artanius with sneers and contempt. Artanius forbade his daughter ever again to speak to or meet Marontius, threatening the most terrible vengeance on both if he was disobeyed.

‘For some time she implicitly obeyed the cruel command, confining herself to her apartments, where she passed her time in tears and sorrowful musings. But love knows no barrier, and one moonlight night her warrior-lover scaled the wall of her father’s garden, where she was walking alone, and implored her in fervent tones not to banish him forever from her sight, but at least to give him the pleasure of seeing her every evening, at a little cabin just without the garden gate.

‘The beautiful Azilla was moved by his words, and unable to resist the passionate pleadings of her lover, consented to meet him secretly. For a long time they were undiscovered, but one evening Lord Artanius, having his suspicions aroused by her frequent absences, caused her to be watched, and when the truth was known his anger knew no bounds. He confined his child in one of the dungeons beneath his castellated mansion, and left her there, amid darkness and gloom, to weep over her blighted hopes.

‘He then matured a plot of the most malicious nature against Marontius, which would have driven the latter into exile and disgrace, with a brand upon his forehead, and ruined him forever. But this was not to be, for a day or two before the blow was to fall, the villanous and cruel plans of Artanius were suddenly cut short by death.

‘When the particulars of the plot against Marontius became known to the king, he was indignant, and to recompense the brave soldier for the risk he had run, conferred on him the estates and title of Artanius, and the hand of the lovely Azilla. Their union was blessed with a daughter, who, with her mother’s name, inherited her mother’s beauty and grace.

‘At that time the Saracens and Turcomans made frequent incursions, for the sake of plunder, upon our territory, appearing suddenly near some isolated mansion, carrying off or slaughtering its inmates, and disappearing with their spoil ere a blow could be struck at them.

‘One beautiful afternoon, about five years after his marriage, Marontius, his wife and child, were enjoying the air, among the tombs we have just left behind, with not more than a dozen attendants, when a party of fifty or sixty Turcoman horsemen suddenly surrounded them, and called on them to surrender.

‘Placing his beloved ones in the ruined tomb of king Icarus, which they then happened to be passing, Marontius and his followers defied the invaders, and a desperate conflict ensued; the superior numbers of the foe, however, gave them such a decided advantage, that in a few moments Marontius found himself fighting alone, his gallant comrades having all fallen

beneath the scimitars of the Arabs, and soon after he himself was struck to the ground bleeding and senseless.

‘The Turcomans, securing Azilla and her daughter, and seeing a large body of horse rapidly approaching from the city to the rescue of Marontius, made a hasty retreat on their swift desert steeds, leaving thirty of their number on the blood-stained sod in front of the tomb, as proofs of the desperate valor of Marontius and his men.

‘The gallant soldier shortly after recovered his senses, but on being informed of the loss of his dear Azilla, and his beauteous daughter, his mind wandered, and since then, for fifteen long years, he has been the pitiable object you have seen him. No trace of his loved ones has ever been discovered. Our late royal master, the present king’s father, placed his estates in charge of an overseer, who, at certain times causes proper sustenance to be conveyed to the tomb where he has his abode.

‘He never leaves his hermitage, save for the purpose of visiting the scene of his former happiness, the palace of Artanius, through the halls of which he will wander at times for hours, in a musing mood, from which he generally wakes with a wild scream, darts away through the busy streets with incredible swiftness, passes the gate, and halts not till he reaches his favorite haunt, the ruined tomb of king Icarus.’

During the narration of this touching tale, the noble features of the knight gave evidence of the deep interest with which he listened to its details, and his clenched hand and compressed lip plainly showed the feelings with which he regarded the villany of the Turcoman spoilers, in thus rudely severing the fondest ties that bind heart to heart.

As Everard concluded, D'Arville raised his mailed hand toward the firmament above him, and with his enthusiastic soul beaming from his manly face, he cried :

‘Hear me, high Heaven, and record on thy imperishable tablets the vow I make. I swear by all that I hold innocent and beautiful, by all that I hold dear, never to rest till I have traced the spoiler to his den—till I have rescued the injured maiden and captive wife from their oppressor—till I have again restored them to their bereaved parent and husband’s arms, and with the radiance of their affectionate glance, brought again the light of reason to his eyes, and banished from his soul the dread darkness which overhangs the mind wrapt in the gloomy veil of madness. If my vow fails in its accomplishment through want of daring, may my lordly banner be trailed in the dust, my trusty sword be ignominiously broken, and the glory of my knighthood depart from me forever.’

Lord Cretolius listened in admiration to this determination, so characteristic of the chivalrous order to which the knight belonged, and Everard felt his heart beat wildly within him, at the thought of the varied adventures through which the warrior must pass ere he could attain the fulfilment of his vow, and in secret almost resolved to own no other leader, and follow the gallant chevalier through the changing scenes of his future course.

While these thoughts passed through Everard’s mind, the cavalcade halted close in front of the massive gate, in the deep shadow cast by the gigantic wall beneath, and between the heavy bars appeared the long vista of a beautiful street dimly seen in the moonlight—the ‘street of palms.’

CHAPTER III.

The street of palms. The street of palaces. The royal levee. The Turcoman princes. Ida Cretolius. An arrival.

THAT noble avenue was aptly named, and was indeed the street of palms. Paved from side to side with massive blocks of stone, which had lain there for ages, it stretched across the beautiful city, strait as an arrow, and smooth as a polished floor.

At some distance from the mansions which bordered it on either hand, two rows of giant palm-trees marked the limits of the foot-paths, and threw their chequered shade upon the broad way beneath, their foliage ever waving in the breeze a welcome to the coming stranger and a farewell to the departing friend.

Thousands on thousands lined the way as far as the eye could reach, and their overhanging branches formed a protecting arch, defending the passer-by from the fervid heats of the summer sun, and the ceaseless droppings of the winter rain.

Over that avenue millions had passed who now slum-

bered peacefully in their graves; the lordly senator, the wealthy merchant, the thriving citizen, and the gallant soldier, all had gazed delighted on the beauteous vista; and though, as passing centuries rolled away, these manly forms continually gave place to others, yet still the street of palms seemed the same as when of old it witnessed the triumphal processions of the mighty queen Zenobia, returning to her imperial palace laden with the spoils of conquered nations—still seemed the same as when it beheld the entrance of the victorious eagles and desolating legions of the Roman armies, led by the terrible Aurelian.

A mile or more from the western gate, an avenue still more beautiful, if possible, than the street of palms, crossed it at right angles, called the street of palaces. At different intervals twenty lordly mansions raised their castellated turrets in the air, each in itself capable of being converted into a strong hold in time of need, each furnished with draw-bridge and portcullis, with donjon-keep and rampart.

From the street of palms, the street of palaces rose gradually for half a mile, till it reached the summit of the hill on which stood the royal palace, the buildings and gardens comprising which covered an area of a square mile.

The moon shone full upon the white columns and marble balconies of the magnificent edifice, and from the windows issued a brilliancy of light which put to shame the gentle beams of Luna. Within, music seeming like that of fairer spheres, hovered in melody amid the gilded cornices, and shook the tapestried walls with a tremulous motion; a blaze of radiance from countless burners illuminated the vast hall, and was reflected

back from jewelled coronets and zones gemmed with the pearls of Persia and the diamonds of Golconda.

Manly forms were there, clad in the richest vestments, and manly hearts beat high with rapture, as amid the mazes of the giddy dance sparkling eyes merrily glanced upon their own, and soft voices fell in gentle cadences on their delighted ears; love and beauty seemed to reign supreme, and even majesty bowed to the sweet control, as the king himself led the fairest maiden of his realm through the figures of the olden waltz.

Yes, she was the fairest among the daughters of Palmyra, and the most graceful in her movements; clad in a dress of purest white, studded with rubies and emeralds, she moved amid the thronging noblesse in the pride of youthful beauty, admired and courted by all, yet unconscious of her own loveliness. A form of queenly stature, and eyes of dark blue, cheeks and lips of rosy red, and auburn hair flowing in waving ringlets on a snowy neck, conspired to render her one of the most fascinating of her sex, but when to these were added the treasures of a noble intellect, the mind of the auditor insensibly acknowledged her the queen of hearts. Such was Ida, the daughter of Lord Cretolius.

In the circling motions of the waltz, the king and his fair partner passed a group of Saracens collected around one of the elaborately carved pillars. Foremost of the group stood two manly figures, clad in the richest styles of the Turcoman court, accompanied by a maiden arrayed in more than eastern magnificence, around whose elegant and voluptuous form fell a veil of the costliest texture, through the gauze of which two sparkling eyes were indistinctly seen, brighter than the star of evening, more beautifully blue than the skies of Italy.

Their attendants, to the number of an hundred and fifty, chosen from the body-guard of the sultan for their loyalty, strength, and skill in arms, remained at a respectful distance from their superiors, and so still were they, that they hardly seemed to breathe, standing in silent sternness like grim statues of the angel of death.

No pleasure seemed to fill their warlike bosoms at the sight of the gay scene before them, but the fiery glances which shot continually from their dark, expressive eyes, and the frowns which knit their scowling brows, evinced the hatred with which they regarded the race whom they considered their enemies.

For awhile the soft measures of the waltz ceased, and the king offered his arm to the fair Ida to conduct her to the balcony. As they passed the Moslem band she thought she heard a deep sigh, and turning in the direction whence it seemed to emanate, her eyes met those of the younger Turcoman, Selim, whose admiring yet sorrowful looks told a tale of heartfelt devotion, which caused her bosom to throb wildly, while her liquid orbs involuntarily were veiled by her drooping eye-lashes.

For an instant, the noble-hearted Selim felt a thrill of delighted surprise. Could it be that the blush which mantled her cheek was brought thither by his earnest gaze? Could it be that the Palmyrene maiden loved the son of her country's foe? The thought of such happiness filled him with hope, and with the ardor of his nation he determined to press his suit at some favorable moment, and seek to win her.

The revengeful Hafed had witnessed all, had read in an instant the thoughts of his younger brother, and the answering emotions of the gentle Ida. His malicious soul was filled with deadly hatred towards Selim, whom

he envied the regard of the fair being whose loveliness had stirred the deepest fountains of his own heart. It was not strange, for all who looked upon her were charmed by her more than angelic beauty.

As the king and Ida stepped out upon the balcony to enjoy the soft breezes of that favored clime after their exercise, the maiden, whose thoughts still dwelt upon the youthful Selim, said, veiling her interest in him studiously :

‘My liege, how long ere you intend giving these Saracen ambassadors a decided answer ? I should not think you would have a moment’s hesitation in denying their demands.’

‘Ah, fair lady,’ replied the king, ‘you do not perfectly understand the state of affairs in Asia Minor and Syria, or the dangerous position in which we are placed, or you would not counsel me to act as you have said.’

‘Well, but what benefit can you possibly derive from keeping them in a state of suspense as to your decision ?’ asked the lady Ida ; ‘I am sure I should be pleased to see them depart as soon as possible, for the presence of those grim warriors seems to cast a gloom over every amusement, and their sombre and malicious looks fill me with dread.’

‘In the present changing state of affairs,’ said the king, ‘when everything in our vicinity seems to be on the point of a great convulsion, when we know not what the next hour may bring to light, nor what new enemies may spring up to interrupt our peaceful course, it is the wisest policy to remain in a neutral state as long as possible, that we may take advantage of passing events, and reserve our strength for the last great but inevitable struggle.’

‘Then you think,’ said Ida, ‘if you deny these ambassadors their demands, that it will involve us in a war with the Turcomans and Saracens?’

‘I am assured that such will be the case, fair lady,’ replied the king, ‘for the vast hordes of the Seljukide sultan are now awaiting but the signal to gather around our beautiful city, and devote it to the horrors of siege, pillage, and rapine, and against their countless numbers we should be unable to cope for an instant unless they were divided through the jealousy of their leaders or some other cause.’

‘That is undoubtedly true,’ responded the lady; ‘but then it were best for us to meet the danger boldly, and perish in defence of our honor, rather than dishonor ourselves by surrendering these Christian knights to their pursuers, and doom those who have thrown themselves on our hospitality to a horrible and lingering death.’

‘But then, stern necessity may compel me to this step, fair Ida,’ said the king. ‘At all events I will deny my answer as long as the Saracen princes seem so well satisfied to remain at our court, and perchance the course of these stirring times may in the interval find occupation for their armies elsewhere.’

‘My liege,’ responded the lady Ida, ‘pardon me, but methinks it would be the very depth of dishonor to deliver up these brave men to the Turcoman ambassadors, and if Palmyra disgraces herself by such an act of wrong, I will forever disown my country, and seek a home in some other realm, where the duties of hospitality are better understood, and more honorable principles of conduct prevail.’

The fair girl spoke bitterly, and with deep feeling,

and as the king gazed upon her countenance, in which indignation was clearly depicted, he sought to turn the conversation into some other channel, as her present mood did not suit the base purposes which he secretly cherished towards her in his heart.

‘Fair Ida, think no more of it ; I did but jest, to try your spirit and loyalty. And even if I entertained such an intention as regards these knights, your sweet pleadings in their behalf would save them from harm. The moving accents of your silvery voice, the gentle glance of your expressive eye, would gain the cause of any for whom you might intercede, and move my heart to consent to your wishes, even though it were of adamant mould.’

Ida started, but recovering herself, said, in a cold tone of voice :

‘The air upon this balcony is damp, my liege. Let us return to the hall, for the music calls again to the dance, and I have promised to tread a measure with my Lord Morden. Ah, here he is, just in time to relieve your majesty of your burden,’ said she, as the nobleman bowed to the king, and offered his arm.

The monarch, in a tone of voice full of deep and hidden meaning, so low that none but the Lady Ida could hear, said :

‘Surely, if it is a burden, it is one I should be proud to bear while life lasts.’

Ida proudly drew herself up to her full height, and with a seemingly unconcerned look curtsied to her king, and taking the arm of the noble, suffered the latter to lead her to a prominent place in the forming sets.

The chief minister of state now joined the king, *saying, as he did so :*

‘The Lady Ida is more charming to-night than I have ever seen her before, and seems to be the centre of attraction. Even those Turcoman princes acknowledge her superior beauty, for my spies tell me their eyes have almost unconsciously followed her movements throughout the whole evening, and the younger one, in particular, pays her a silent, but heartfelt devotion, which I should say was nearly akin to love.’

‘Say you so,’ replied the king, ‘then they shall quickly have their answer, and receive permittance to depart. Selim is too dangerous a rival to be permitted to remain here, for I know well that the modest and respectful manner in which you say he pays his homage, is better calculated to win her proud heart than the most forward gallantry. By heaven, I love her too well to suffer her ever to love another.’

‘But, my liege,’ said the minister, in astonishment, ‘you would not wish to destroy the fair tenement of beauty—to—to—that is, my liege, I am sure it will be the cause of much trouble, if you persist in carrying out this intention. The Lord Cretolius and his noble son would not tamely submit, and a civil war might be the consequence.’

‘I care not much for them,’ replied the king, ‘since many a mile of sea and land intervenes between us, and perhaps ere this they sleep in the grave. The dangers of their adventurous journey, and the long period which has elapsed since they were heard from, settles that point completely in my mind. The beautiful Ida, as yet, knows not that my attentions are the result of a passionate love, but considers them as the gallantries to which she is so accustomed.’

‘My liege,’ responded the minister, ‘her majesty,

your royal consort, would find enough to rouse her revengeful spirit, and would not tamely submit to such an act. If you divorced her, she would soon find means to bring the powerful armies of her father, the Byzantine emperor, against you.'

'Then would I league with the Turcoman for his destruction,' exclaimed the king, in anger. 'But what right have you to stand here talking thus to me? Is a monarch to hear a lecture from a subject? Away! leave me; breathe but a word of what I have said, and I will apply a moral to your sermon that will make you dearly rue its delivery.'

The minister bowed, and left him, half in sorrow, and half in indignation, saying to himself:

'This must not be. I have been faithful for years to the family of the king, while virtue ruled their counsels, but I shall never acknowledge the dominion of a vicious monarch, and I shall see if I cannot secretly thwart his purposes. If Lord Cretolius should return now, all would be well.'

At that moment, the door of the guard-room opened, and three officers of the guard entered, and having sought the king, one of them addressed him thus:

'My liege, will your majesty deign to hear me? Two travellers have arrived at the gate, and desire admittance. As your majesty has given orders that no person shall be admitted during the hours of night without your express permission, we have sought your presence to obtain it.'

'Who, and what are they, that causes the appearance of my brave officers at this unusual hour?'

'Lord Cretolius, and his son Everard.'

'Lord Cretolius!' exclaimed the king, with a start of

surprise ; ‘ how un—’ unwelcome, he would have said, but quickly recovering himself, and changing the frown on his brow to an affable smile,—‘ how unexpected, yet how pleasant is this news. Come they alone ?’

‘ No, your majesty, a knight of the order of St. John, an envoy to your royal highness from Cyprus, is in their company.’

‘ What, ho ! Duke Cestalius, take the imperial legion of our guard, and speed to the western gate. The long-absent sons of Palmyra are there, Lord Cretolius and the young Everard ; conduct them with due honor to their ancient palace, and there leave them.’

At this announcement the dancers ceased, and amid the conversation which ensued, Ida left the hall in delighted haste, and in a very few moments was riding rapidly homewards, surrounded by a band of armed attendants, to prepare a welcome for her father and brother.

Knights armed in haste, and nobles mounted their steeds. Hundreds of their followers, with banners and polished arms, set out in advance of the imperial legion, and ere long the brilliant cortege turned into the street of palms, and proceeded towards the western gate.

CHAPTER IV.

The castle of Cretolius. A gorgeous welcome. The knights of St. John. The lieutenant's tale. An explanation.

LADY IDA, having reached her home, gave orders to her couriers to waken the adherents of the house of Cretolius, and call them to the castle. The trumpets of her heralds rang out upon the morning air, and their cries resounded again and again as they shouted :

‘Cretolians, rally round your ancient banners, and our sweet Lady Ida. The Lord Cretolius comes from a far land, and the lady calls you to his welcome.’

This call was not without effect, for soon from every dwelling in the vicinity of the castle, and in that quarter of the city where it was situated, issued armed men, and ere long the Lady Ida marshalled before her mansion three thousand sturdy retainers, with helmet and breastplate, with spear, and shield, and scimitar, whose armor shone in the beams of the fast waning moon like silver.

Lights glanced past the loop-holes of the castle, and

flashed from the casements; servant-maids ran over each other in long passages in their hurry, and waiters tripped against stone stairs in dark corridors.

The banqueting hall was cleared of the accumulated rubbish of three years, and the tables were spread with a small but choice repast. Dusty bed-rooms were swept and cleaned, which had not been opened since the noble left his home. Lamps were lighted again, in whose vases mould had been accumulating for months.

The Lady Ida seemed to be everywhere. One moment in the court, the next in the hall, then in the highest turret, to which she often ran to ascertain if she could see aught of the welcome comers. At last, while standing there, she suddenly heard, amid the pauses of the breeze, the sound of distant music, and soon the bright torches carried at the van of the cortege, appeared, turning into the long street from the street of palms.

Nearer and nearer pealed the martial notes, nearer came the banners of the imperial legion, and ere long, while rank after rank filed past the castle with glittering arms and floating plumes of snowy white, the vaulted halls and corridors echoed back the shouts of the armed bands and the answering welcome of the Cretolian retainers, who were drawn up in two long lines on either side of the avenue.

Behind the legionaries rode a gay and gallant group of nobles and knights in the most splendid costumes; and in their midst Ida's quick eye distinguished the loved forms of her father and brother, between whom she saw a chevalier in dark armor, who appeared to be carrying on an animated conversation with them.

The gorgeous array stopped in front of the castle. After bowing to the assembled nobles, all of whom refused politely an invitation to enter, thinking their presence might mar the pleasure of the family re-union, Lord Cretolius, Everard, and D'Arville, rode across the drawbridge, and found themselves in the spacious court. Here they dismounted and entered the hall, where the lovely Ida threw herself into her parent's arms, and with her eyes gazing into his, murmured :

‘My father, my dear father!’

‘My sweet daughter, my dearest Ida! How have you prospered during our absence?’

‘Well—as well as could be expected, when those I loved were away. All I wanted was the presence of yourself and Everard to make my happiness complete. Brother,’ said she, turning to Everard, and holding out her hands, which he grasped with affectionate warmth, and imprinted a kiss on her lips—‘how I have longed for your return!’

‘Now we are here, we must to-night be happy enough to atone for the dreary hours of absence past,’ answered Everard, who then introduced D'Arville.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

How they passed the next hour or two in relating incidents, in making inquiries, in telling anecdotes, and describing scenes, as they sat around the banquet-room, while the retainers feasted in the great hall below, we leave the traveller, returned home, to judge; and sweet was sleep on the eyelids of all when they retired to rest.

* * * * *

The sun was scarce two hours high, when D'Arville

INTRODUCTION OF THE KNIGHT OF THE SILVER CROSS.



Presentation of the Lady Ida to the Knight of St. John.—See page 31.



13
C. P.

and Everard sallied forth from the gateway of the castle to enjoy a walk in the street of palms. Here they came suddenly upon a spacious mansion, embowered in trees, in front of which, to his surprise, D'Arville saw a number of men engaged in cleaning black armor of the same description as that usually worn by the knights of St. John, but he was still more surprised when some of them, on perceiving him, advanced and greeted him with the salute usually given to a superior officer.

Their faces seemed familiar, he entered the gate and discovered that they were no others than the brave knights of his own troop whom he had left a month before in Northern Syria, under command of his lieutenant.

'Ha!' said he to one, 'how is this? what strange chance hath brought you hither?'

'That, Sir D'Arville, is a long tale, and cannot be told in a moment. If you will step in, you will find the lieutenant, with the rest of the troop, making merriment at the table, and I think he understands the matter better than I do,' replied the soldier.

D'Arville and Everard passed through the porch, and hearing the sound of voices through a half open door, they stopped a moment ere they entered, to view the scene which presented itself.

A long table stretched through the apartment, on which were scattered promiscuously, drinking cups, flagons of wine, baskets of fruit, and other light edibles. Sixty or seventy knights of the order of St. John were seated around it, clad in a sort of military undress, their armor being hung against the walls of the apartment on stout hooks made expressly for the purpose.

At the head of the table the banner of D'Arville was displayed from the ceiling, and beneath it sat the lieutenant of the corps and six chevaliers of rank superior to the rest—younger sons of noble families, whose purses were too slender to admit of their maintaining themselves in the splendor in which they had been brought up, and their pride too soaring to allow them to be dependent on their more fortunate elder brothers.

The drinking cups of all were filled, and they rose to drink a sentiment of one of the chevaliers, which was as follows :

'Death to Palmyra—if e'er her king and rulers prove themselves base enough to give us into the hands of our foe.'

The cups were hardly drained when D'Arville pushed open the door and entered, saying :

'Methinks you have but little fear of death to yourselves, to drink death to Palmyra, within its walls by daylight.'

'An Arville! an Arville!' shouted many of the knights.

'Welcome to D'Arville!' rang out from every quarter.

'Fill up, fill up, brave hearts, fill up to the brim, and drink a welcome to the pride of chivalry. Here is a welcome glass to our brave leader,' said the lieutenant, handing a cup of wine to the knight, and another to Everard. 'Now for my toast, since you are all ready :

'May the sword of D'Arville often again cleave a way with ours to the heart of the Moslem camp, as it has often done in by-gone days. May his snowy plume ever be the beacon to guide us through the stormy field of fight, and his life be continued till the

last follower of Mahomet shall have perished from the face of the earth.'

A round of applause followed this, which made the floor tremble beneath their feet, and D'Arville having announced his friend, they both took seats at the head of the table, amid cries of 'Hail to D'Arville and the future Lord of Cretolius.'

'Now, Sebastian, if it please you,' said D'Arville, 'we will be amused with the story of your adventures and those of our brave knights since I last left you in Northern Syria, and the series of adventures which may have caused you to come hither.'

'Well, you shall be gratified, and when you have heard it, you cannot but acknowledge that at least I know how to manage a good retreat,' said the lieutenant, Sebastian, laughingly.

'One sunny afternoon, just about a week after you left us, the governor of Anlar, hearing there was a band of Turcoman horse, numbering about two hundred, ravaging the country twenty or thirty miles to the south-east, sent us out in pursuit of the knaves, to see if we could not stop their marauding. We rode all the afternoon, and did not see anything of them till nightfall, when we reached the summit of a hill, and perceived, far away over the sands, an encampment which we supposed to be our foes.

'After waiting awhile, and finding no movement among the tents, we concluded they did not see us, and as soon as darkness closed around us, we directed our course towards their position, taking the stars as our guide, and did not doubt that we should be able to reach them by midnight.

'Having no means of judging of the lapse of time,

to give my band into the hands of these scarlet-robed Turcomans, and he shall find, ere he can, blood will flow like water through his streets. At all events, methinks I have something for his ear which will make him quickly decide whether he would have us friends or foes.'

'If the king should wish to betray you,' responded Everard, 'I can guarantee to you my assistance and that of my father in your defence, and should it come to blows, we have a noble legion of citizen soldiers, three thousand strong, who would fight to the last for the honor of Palmyra, and the interest of the house of Cretolius.'

'I thank you,' said D'Arville, as he pressed Everard's hand, 'for the interest you evince towards my warriors and myself; and should I ever have occasion to return it, you will find I am not ungrateful. But we must hasten to your father's house and acquaint him with that we have just learned. Sebastian, I would see you ere nightfall at the palace of Cretolius. To-night I am to be presented at court, and as the Turcoman warriors are there as a suite to the ambassador princess, I also, as an envoy, have the right to introduce my own suite. From the known character of Hafed, we may have some bloody work there, but at all events, we will be ready for the knaves should they attack us; therefore, my gallants, polish up your arms and cleanse your doublets, that we may make an appearance calculated to impress favorably the minds of the nobility. For the present, I bid you all adieu.'

The knight and Everard now took their leave, the whole band rising from their seats in deference, as the guests passed the threshold, and were soon again in the street of palms on their homeward way.

CHAPTER V.

D'Arville's reception by the king. Rescue of the princess Azalie. Ingratitude of Hafed, the Lion of Turkestan. The king's base proposal. Ida's indignation.

THE evening sun threw his last rays upon the dome of the imperial palace, and gilded the arms of the sentries who paced the summits of every tower, and as the light of day faded from without, the spacious halls of the marble edifice gradually became dim and gloomy. An hour passed, and no sound of revelry had been heard around. Nought was there visible to the eye or apparent to the ear, which would have led a chance passer-by, in the silent twilight hour, to imagine that here the majesty of Palmyra held its chosen home.

Soon, along the highway, the tread of armed men was heard, and now the appearance of the first noble guest, with a gallant retinue, seemed to be the signal for a change as sudden as it was striking. From every turret gleamed a vivid brightness, from every window

issued a radiant light, and every hall of the wide-spread palace became illuminated with a blaze of splendor.

Noble succeeded noble, knight followed knight, in rapid succession, and with them came the beauty and the worth of Palmyra. The Turcoman princes, Hafed and Selim, were there with their fair sister, Azalie, attended by their suite of grim Moslem warriors. All was in readiness; the king, seated upon a throne of gold, inlaid with emerald and pearl, wore upon his brow the diadem of his race, and in his right hand rested the sceptre which swayed the destinies of his people. Beside him bloomed his youthful queen, a northern violet transplanted to a warmer clime—the rose-bud from the banks of the dark-flowing Marmora, blossoming upon the plains of Syria.

But now a burst of stirring melody awoke the echoes of the place, and those whose presence all had awaited appeared. The heavy footsteps of mailed knights clanked upon the marble floor of the corridor, passed the ante-room, and when the doors swung back upon their pivots, there appeared the envoy of St. John, Lord Cretolius, and Everard. Close upon their footsteps came a hundred veterans of the order, in solid square, armed cap-a-pie, who, as they trode heavily past the Turcoman band, and took their places opposite by direction of a master of ceremonies, cast upon them glances of stern defiance, and received in return looks of dark hatred.

The king graciously welcomed the duke and Everard, and as the former presented D'Arville, the monarch extended his hand to the manly warrior, expressing his pleasure at the interview, and desiring to know how he could best meet his wishes.

‘Most noble prince of an ancient race,’ said D’Arville, ‘I come from Alan Grevana, commander in Cyprus, of the order of St. John, and viceroy of the realm, to bring to your knowledge important intelligence, of which I am the bearer, and point out dangers in your course which none here have yet discovered. I am the honored instrument of a mighty brotherhood-in-arms, empowered to act and treat with you for the benefit of the order, and the destruction of our mutual foes, and ask, respectfully, that you will grant me a hearing in presence of your assembled senate in secret council.’

‘The ambassador of such a puissant ruler as Grevana of Cyprus, and the representative of the gallant knights of the silver cross, whose deeds of chivalric renown have rang throughout Palestine, and caused Arabia and the East to tremble, hath but to ask, and he shall have ready and sympathizing auditors,’ replied the king.

‘And when,’ said D’Arville, ‘shall I have the honor of presenting my message to the king and nobility of this favored city of the orient?’

The king whispered to his minister, and answered:

‘At the third hour before midday to-morrow, my Lord Cretolius will conduct you to the senate-chamber, where the lords and barons of the realm will meet you. Herald, proclaim aloud our mandate that all may hear.’

Three times the herald of the king sounded his bugle, and as the last note died away, a silence prevailed throughout the assemblage, so that the words of the herald were heard by all, as he cried:

‘Listen to the word of the king!’ Dukes, lords,

barons, and senators, of this ancient city and this glorious kingdom, we summon you to the senate-chamber of the palace, to-morrow morn, three hours before the sun shall reach the meridian, that you may hear and ponder upon the words of Alan Grevana, commander in Cyprus, of the military order of the knights of St. John of Malta, as delivered by the mouth of his valiant brother-in-arms, Percy D'Arville, knight grand cross of the order, and baronet of the realm. Hear and obey.'

After this ceremony, the king descended from his throne, and having assumed his ball-dress, re-appeared, and gave the signal for the festivities to commence. During the time he had been conferring with D'Arville, the Lady Ida had entered, and as she thought, unperceived. But the monarch's quick eye discovered her form as she stepped into an alcove and seated herself on the cushions around it, and he now sought her as his partner in the dance.

Sir Percy D'Arville laid aside his massive armor, and clad in a dress of dark blue, trimmed with gold, lightly touched the hand of the queen, and with her moved gracefully amid the dancers.

Directly over the spot, where stood the Turcoman princess, Azalie, a massive globe, several feet in circumference, was suspended, from whose side issued jets of brilliant flame. Some cause had weakened the supporting chains which attached it to the ceiling, and the regular vibrations of the music and the dance so tried their power, that one after another snapped in quick succession, just as D'Arville, who had perceived the dangerous situation of the princess, snatched her in his arms, and lightly sprang aside with his fair burden,

who would otherwise have been inevitably crushed beneath the weight of the heavy globe, as it fell crashing to the floor with a startling sound.

The veil of the princess, as it waved out behind her with the quick motion of the knight; was caught by the descending mass and torn from her head, and there, in D'Arville's embrace, close to his manly form, his surprised but raptured eyes beheld the loveliest woman they ever had rested on, and as he looked upon her beautiful features, and gazed deep into her soul-lit orbs, which glanced first upon the shivered globe upon the floor, and were then raised to his in gratefulness, and as quickly averted in modest bashfulness, he felt that the citadel of his heart, which he had hitherto held impregnable, had at last fallen, conquered by the loveliness of a gentle Moslem maiden.

The princess modestly withdrew herself from his arms, a blush mantling her fair brow, and deepening the roses on her cheeks. At this moment, the elder Turcoman, Hafed, sprang forward, with fury displayed in every lineament of his countenance, and seizing the knight quickly and unexpectedly from behind, flung him violently down among the sharp fragments of the globe, exclaiming, as he did so, in the Arabic tongue:

'Accursed Giaour! dog of a Christian! darest thou to touch with thy unclean hand, the peerless daughter of Ben Istam, the pride of the Turcoman tribes! Darest thou to lay thy foul fingers upon the flower of the Euphrates! By Mahomet, had I my scimitar, did not the infidel monarch fear to let the sons of Turcomania wear their trusty steel within his polluted hall, I would sever thy head from thy detested body, and give thy carcase to the vulture and carrion beasts of prey!'

‘Thou art wrong, brother,’ said Selim, catching in his arms the form of Azalie, as she sank fainting backwards, ‘and hasty as the desolating simoom which sweeps over the only oasis in the desert. The Christian did nobly and well, and has kept mourning from the tribes of Ben Istam, and wailing from the household of our fathers. May the choicest favors of the prophet fall forever on his head, like the dews of morn, and may his life be sweeter than the air of dawn which hath passed across a thousand fields of roses.’

‘Fool!’ answered Hafed, ‘wilt thou, too, be an infidel dog? Now by the beard of the prophet, I could throw thee upon the senseless shape of this swine-eating Frank, and send thy contemptible soul to the regions of the accursed with a good will.’

‘And as for me,’ exclaimed Selim, as his fine face flushed with indignation, ‘I can meet thee in the strength of a good heart, and with the help of Allah, to whom be all honor, give thee to the eternal stings of a conscience over which ingratitude hovers like the nights of Egypt, and offer the angel of death a fitting victim. I dare you to the trial!’

‘Silence!’ cried an officer of the guard, having made his way to the spot, with two or three hundred of the imperial legion, ‘say but another word, and I will show you both to the darkest dungeons of the palace keep. Your ambassadorship will not save you from such a fate. Back! knights of St. John! for there must be no tumult here in presence of the king!’ continued the lieutenant, perceiving the veterans, who had now discovered the cause of the uproar, were endeavoring to force a passage through the dancers to the spot. The officer drew his men up in two lines along the

hall, one facing the Turcomans and the other the aroused knights, both of whom seemed anxious to sweep away the wall of weapons that intervened, and bathe their hands in each other's blood. Others of the legion now entering, soon succeeded in restoring order, and after some delay all went on as before.

In the meantime Selim had placed the princess Azalie in care of a female attendant, and assisted Everard and a few nobles in raising D'Arville from the floor, and conveying him to an adjacent apartment, whither the Lady Ida, leaving the king, also hastened. Here, while employed with the others in endeavoring to restore the knight to consciousness, her eyes often met those of Selim, and once, when her hand accidentally touched his, the rich blood leaped into her beautiful face, and gave her eyes a softer expression. She had witnessed the whole scene just past, and heard the words which ensued between Hafed and Selim. As she understood the Arab tongue, she knew from his words that he did not feel any malice towards her nation and race, and his passionate look, while it thrilled her own heart, taught her that love had changed a bitter foe into a warm friend.

The Lady Ida, having re-entered the hall, accepted the arm of the king, and at his invitation stepped into a magnificent apartment with him, at the opposite end of the room, whither he said the queen had retired, with her suite of maidens, to view some curiosities which had just been sent to her by her father, from Marmora. As they crossed the threshold, he whispered to an officer of the guard a few words, which she did not distinctly hear.

The officer shut the door behind them, and Ida found herself alone with the king!

‘My liege, how is this? I do not see the queen nor her maidens. Did I misunderstand your words, when I imagined I heard you say they were here, examining some curious embroidery from the hands of the Greek maidens?’ asked Ida.

‘Nay, fair lady, you heard rightly,’ replied the king.

‘Then where are they? or why have you deceived me?’

‘Hear me a few moments, and I would tell you all you would know,’ responded the monarch.

‘Nay, my liege, I cannot stay alone with you. It were unmaidenly, and if I do not quickly return to the company, will excite remarks hurtful to my pure fame. This is ungenerous in you, my liege.’

‘Let my love be my excuse, for it is all the excuse I have.’

‘Love!’ exclaimed the fair Ida, in astonishment, ‘for whom?’

‘For your own beautiful self, sweet girl,’ said the king, passionately. ‘I love you dearly, fondly, devotedly. I cannot, will not live without you, for you are dearer to me than all besides. Kingdom, wealth, power, and honor, are nought to me, without your love. Those gently expressive eyes, that charming face, those tempting lips, that voluptuous form, have raised in my own bosom a storm of passion, which—’

‘Man! know you to whom you talk?’ cried the indignant Ida, whose dark blue orbs flashed fire, as the warm blood mounted over bosom, neck, cheeks, and temples, to her very forehead, ‘and have you forgotten yourself? Go to your injured queen, confess your fault, tell her what you have dared to do, and ask her forgiveness and that of heaven. Tell her you have

spoken of dishonor to a daughter of the house of Cretolius, tell her you have sought to sully the escutcheon of our lordly race, and tell her that the reward you would bestow upon them for the blood and treasure they have spent in your service, is the basest ingratitude, shown in this attempt to overwhelm them with shame, and then—'

'Fair maiden, you wrong me,' interrupted the king, as he attempted to take her hand, 'hear me but a moment.'

'I have heard too much, sir,' said she. 'Unhand me, or by all that I hold virtuous I will make you repent this. As it is I will publish it to those without, and ask how long they will be ruled by such a villain.'

The king laughed hoarsely as Ida rushed to the door, and threw it wide open. She started back in affright, for close at her bosom were the points of a dozen spears, wielded by the guardsmen of the imperial legion, and ere she could recover from her terror, the lieutenant again shut it, and Ida heard the springing of a heavy bolt without. She stood still in thought an instant, and then, turning to the king, cried :

'Allow me to leave this room, and that instantly, or I will raise an alarm that will bring to my relief those who would wreak vengeance upon your guilty head.'

'Try it and see,' replied he. 'I knew what I was doing when I brought you hither, and the wildest shrieks you chose to pour forth would not be able to penetrate these walls. Beware, lest your opposition change my love to hate, for I can hate as well as love.'

'Well, then, I defy you,' said Ida, 'I dare you to hate me. Do your worst, and you will find that innocence and virtue are proofs against such malice as

yours. Now, sir, will you cause this door to open or not?"

The king hesitated, and thinking for a while, at last came to the conclusion he could not advance his suit at that time, and therefore it would be as well to let her escape him for the present, if he could only get from her a solemn promise never to betray his secret, resolving in his own mind to place other agencies at work for the accomplishment of his intentions.

'I will allow you to leave me, if you will swear not to divulge what has passed between us.'

'Sir, I will publish it to the four winds of heaven,' said she. 'I will bring upon you the anger of my father and my brother, and teach you that a daughter of our house is not to be insulted with impunity.'

'Then you will never leave this place alive!' exclaimed the king, advancing towards her with a drawn dagger in his grasp—'choose, death or the oath of secrecy!'

'What! a murderer also? strike, then, if you dare!' said Ida, boldly facing him. 'Ah, you tremble in every limb, you quail before the fearless glance of innocence, and your coward hand refuses to obey the cruel mandates of your heart!'

'My heart!' exclaimed he, as he staggered back, and clasped the hand from which the dagger fell, upon his brow, 'my heart is agonized with your scorn, and torn with your refusal!'

'I will promise you not to reveal your actions for a twelvemonth, and thus give you a chance to atone for your fault by good conduct,' said Ida, imagining that the tears fast falling from between his fingers were those of repentance.

The king caught at the promise, and cried : ' Sweet girl; I throw myself upon your generosity, I accept your kind promise, I have done bitter wrong. O, do not make this, my error, the cause of my ruin ! It is the first wrong act of my life, and I promise you it shall be the last !'

' Well, sir, so let it be. But, remember, dare ever to speak to me again during that twelvemonth, and you shall dearly rue it. My threat I shall hold as inviolable as my promise.'

' Kind angel, I thank you. What ! ho ! without ! allow the Lady Ida instant egress !'

At this the bolt flew back, the door opened, and Lady Ida, without deigning a single glance at the apparently weeping monarch, moved proudly from the room, and passing through the guard, succeeded in reaching her brother's side in safety, where she was glad to find that it was supposed herself and the king had merely stepped into the balcony of the palace to enjoy the refreshing air.

' Ha, ha !' said the king, as soon as he was alone, ' does she imagine I will be thus foiled ? My tears were those of anger and wounded pride. I will soon contrive to get her in my power, in some manner which shall clear me of all suspicion of having connived at her disappearance.'

CHAPTER VI.

*The knight's guerdon. Hafed's anger. A des-
conflict. The bower of the Lady Ida. Selim'
of love. Ida's resolution.*

D'ARVILLE recovered his senses in the course of an hour, but those around him concluded it would not be advisable to tell him what had passed till his strength was fully restored.

His first inquiry was for the Turcoman prince who had saved ; and being told she was in health and unharmed, his mind sought to discover the cause of the present situation, and the means by which he became covered with bruises. He was led to believe that a part of the globe had remained suspended from the wall when the rest fell, but had dropped afterwards upon him. This seemed perfectly satisfactory, and he asked no more questions.

Ere long the hour of departure arrived, and as Cretolius had dispensed with a portion of his services that evening, it was agreed that the troop of knights should escort the Lady Ida and her father to home, after which Everard and D'Arville intended

proceed to the quarters of the corps, and spend a social hour. The knight, therefore, proceeded to don his armor, and the others to make their preparations. While thus engaged, the Moslem passed through the ante-room, and Hafed could not resist the temptation thus offered him, and tauntingly addressed D'Arville as follows :

‘How likedst thou, vile Frank, thy resting place among the broken brass of Arda? was it a pillow for thy knightly head of fitting softness? By the prophet, thou wert in the very midst of thy glory then.’

‘What say you, knave? Let me understand your words, for they seem to me as senseless as yourself,’ said the knight.

‘Ha, slave, senseless! But thou wert senseless a short time since, when I flung thee on the floor, for daring to presume to lay thy accursed hands on the fair princess Azalie,’ cried Hafed.

‘Begone, knave; you boast of that it is not in your power to perform. If your imagination leads you thus astray, I am here to prove its wanderings false as the mists of Egypt.’

‘I boast not; Hafed cares not to boast idly, for that which I have said I this night performed. Have the poor tremblers at your side told you otherwise, then I will say their tongues are like the tongues of their race—deceitful as the serpent.’

‘Is this true?’ said D'Arville, as his now flashing eye glanced quickly from one to the other; ‘is this true? Does no one contradict it? There, then, Saracen, is my defiance, and with it take my bitterest malison,’ continued he, as he brought his mailed hand down upon the turbaned head of Hafed with such force as to *cause the latter to sink at his feet insensible.*

The knight stalked proudly and indignantly from the apartment, leaving the Turcomans to discover their prince as best they might, and was soon engaged in conversation with his friends of the house of Cretolius, as they rode along the highway, escorted by the knights of St. John.

The prince Hafed soon recovered, and asked of those who had raised him to call his band around him. They came; and while he stood an instant to recover his strength and recall his scattered thoughts, they gazed in silence upon his flushed brow, his fiery eye and compressed lip, and intuitively knew there was desperate and deadly work on hand for them.

‘Where is my smooth-tongued brother?’ asked he.

‘He hath not returned hither to us,’ answered a soldier, ‘since he aided to remove that galliard dog of a Christian from the bed of brass whereon you so boldly laid him.’

‘Fool!’ cried Hafed, ‘he hath doubtless sought to carry his pretty face into the harem of that Christian beauty, in whom he takes such interest. He thinks I know nought of it, but I overheard him, in his dreams last night, talk of scaling her window, and offering her a share of his future throne. Now may all the ghouldes in Turkestan seize them, ere either of them touch the sceptre of the East. And that black-mailed Frank, he has smitten a prince of the tribe of Ben Istam, and may the prophet banish me from paradise, if I do not send his soul to wander amid the darkness of Tartarus, ere yon fast-waning crescent shall veil her silver light.’

Thus saying, the prince led his warriors to the courtyard, where their armor was deposited, and having seen all accoutred, and mounted on their snowy and

powerful steeds, he rapidly took the way in pursuit of the knights, leaving the fair Azalie behind in charge of a dozen of his men. They soon reached the street of palms, and turning towards the eastern gate, crossed a few wide avenues, and drew up before the edifice usually occupied by the knights.

Dismounting, they rushed through the gate, passed the garden and entered the house, hoping to effect a surprise, but no one was within, and they returned to their horses, Hafed hurriedly addressing his followers thus :

‘ ’Tis better that it should be so, for now we will meet them in the broad street, where our nimble steeds and glancing scimitars will give us an advantage over their slow squadrons. Follow, and let us form our ranks in yon dark lane, from whence we can dash into their midst sudden as the snows which every spring glide in a crushing avalanche adown Turkestan’s mountain sides. Follow, and let our course be as the simoom of the desert which sweeps onward in silent destructiveness.’

Having led them to a narrow lane, where darkness was thick and gloomy, where the moon fell not—a lane which entered the street of palms at right angles—he there formed them, and seemingly, to the chance passer, nought within that dim lane indicated that in its obscurity the Moslem awaited, with deadly intent, the approach of the Christian knights.

* * * * *

‘ Yes,’ said D’Arville to Everard, ‘ you are right. We are now near our quarters, and when we are safe within its walls, I will tell you many a tale of bold adventure that will make you wish for knightly honors.’

‘I shall be glad to listen,’ responded Everard, and then, as the idea entered his mind, ‘but methinks the style in which you bearded the traitorous Hafed would form the ground-work for a bitter hatred. He is said to be as unforgiving and revengeful in character, as he is relentless in his treatment of his Christian captives, and daring in his attempts to capture them.’

‘His hatred is nothing,’ replied D’Arville, ‘for mine is doubly strong. If he would seek revenge he shall have it, but it shall be mine to give it, in answer to the fall he gave me this night. I care not for him, and only hope he will give me the chance of meeting him face to face. Then, with the help of St. John, my good sword shall maintain and defend the defiance I sent him. Would that he and his troop of wolfish slaves were here now, and I would show you of what stuff our gallant knights are made. You should see a combat worth witnessing.’

‘He is here, in your path, Frankish dog!’ cried Hafed, dashing suddenly from his hiding-place, and aiming a blow at the head of D’Arville; ‘death to the infidel. Warriors of Ben Istam, forward, forward! strike till the red blood shall stream upon your scimitars like crimson rain. Onward for the glory of the mountain-tribe—*Alla-il-Allah! Alla-il-Allah!* He is great, and Mahomet is his prophet. Onward, like the scathing lightning, warriors of the scarlet turban.’

One moment within the dark lane was heard the quick trampling of steeds, the ringing of arms and accoutrements; the next, the Moslem burst forth from the entrance into the bright moonlight, which bathed their glittering sabres in silver, and dashed into the dark ranks of the knights of St. John, who were scattered in an instant before this unexpected charge.

‘Rally, knights of St. John, rally!’ cried D’Arville, as he fought hand to hand with Hafed. ‘Will you let the despised slaves of an eastern tyrant trample you down thus? Rally, for God and St. John, knights of the silver cross; strike for the glory of your order.’

Quickly recovering, the dark-mailed soldiers of the cross gathered their iron phalanx, and pressed upon the Moslem from every quarter, mingling their ranks with those of the scarlet-robed foe, till the scene seemed variegated with red and black. Bright scimitars shone downwards in the moonlight, and while piercing shriek or stifled groan gave evidence of their deadly effect, they rose again tinged with a ruddier dye. Steel rang against steel, and shivered lance and broken shield gave out a clear sound on the midnight air. Higher and fiercer rose the strife—louder and sterner the heavy blows resounded through the firmament, as the shining weapons crashed through helmet and breastplate, or were met by a warding stroke.

Mingled were the cries of ‘Alla-il-Allah;’ ‘St. John and the silver cross;’ ‘onward for Ben Istam and glory;’ ‘strike for St. John and victory;’ and amid the tumult, where gleamed the diamonds in the helmet of Hafed the Lion of Turkestan, the snowy plume of D’Arville, the pride of chivalry, waved above the fiercely-contested scene of strife. The rush of the Moslem charge had separated these leaders, but now, as the hand of Hafed smote the dauntless and gallant Everard from his horse, D’Arville caught sight of the Turcoman, and his irresistible weapon cleft a way through the intervening followers of Mahomet, leaving behind him a line of dead, till his steed bounded against that of the prince, and he cried:

‘Now, base ingrate, I am ready to take back the guerdon of my regard I gave thee in the palace ante-room—that stunning blow. Come on, and let me see if thou canst be as bold in the field as when thou took me at a vantage in the hall. St. John and victory, but that was well-aimed,’ said he, as he warding the stroke of Hafed’s light scimitar, and brought his own weapon down towards the prince’s head, ‘see if that will be truer to the mark.’

Hafed, by touching his steed with the spur, evaded the blow, and then springing forward, struck his scimitar into the face of the knight, inflicting a wound on his cheek.

‘Ha! have I you there, Christian slave? am I a boaster now? Now will I send thy soul to the region of despair; now will I strike for Ben Istam and the prophet—thus and thus.’

As he said this, Hafed attempted to sheath his scimitar in D’Arville’s throat, but the latter, with a blow of his weapon, shattered that of the Turcoman in pieces, and as the prince gave back, the gallant knight shouted, swinging his heavy sword against the head of Hafed:

‘And I strike, knave, for St. John and the holy cross, before whom the prophet and thy race must fall, as thou shalt before my arm.’

The form of Hafed quivered an instant, and then fell senseless into the arms of a follower, who bore the body rapidly away on his swift steed, shouting:

‘The lion of our tribe has fallen. Sons of Ben Istam, your gallant leader has been smote to the earth by the white-plumed Frank. Hafed leaveth the field to the victor.’

These words were the signal for a flight of the assailants, who now turned with deep execrations, and followed the course taken by the rider bearing the inanimate form of their prince.

The moon's cold rays fell on a scene of blood in that fair street of palms. The pavement was strewn with broken arms, and side by side on the cold stone lay the Moslem warrior and the gallant knight, in the calm sleep of death. Many a manly cheek was blanched, and many a noble heart had ceased its pulsations. Twenty of the soldiers of the silver cross had fallen in the encounter, and forty of the chivalric sons of Ben Istam bit the dust.

Everard was raised from his unpleasant situation and conveyed into the armory of the knights, which was close at hand. Here the physician of the corps examined his wounds, and pronounced them not dangerous, and not of a nature to have any other effect than a few minutes' insensibility. On hearing this, the knight involuntarily exclaimed :

'Heaven be praised, for it were indeed a pity should this brave youth have perished thus in a street-fight. I hope he may live to become an honored member of the order. I'faith, it was a galliard fray, and a welcome one, and gallantly have my brave knights performed their devoirs.

* * * * *

The chamber occupied by the Lady Ida was in the wing of the castle of Cretolius, overlooking the inner garden of the court, from whence a trellis ran up over her window, and wreathed itself around the casement, hanging down in graceful festoons upon a little ledge a few feet below. This ledge ran around the whole

wing, and terminated at the stairs leading up the western front. At this time the moon shone from the opposite side of the window, so that a dark shade was cast upon the garden, and the face of the wall whence her window looked forth was wrapt in its gloom.

This chamber was large and spacious, and though originally a sleeping apartment, was now used as a boudoir by the Lady Ida, who retired to rest in an adjacent room. In the boudoir were seen the innumerable little articles of vertu which constitute one of the chief charms of these bowers of beauty, and musical instruments were dispersed in convenient situations. The furniture was of the most magnificent description, and soft couches and crimson hangings gave the whole an air of ease and comfort, quite in contrast with its outward appearance. A bright light burned in the centre of the ceiling, which threw its radiant flood into the remotest corner, into the deepest crevice, and flashed out from the window in splendor.

Upon the softest couch, with her side toward the window, sat the Lady Ida, looking like the very impersonification of beauty. Her soft, white hands supported her cheek, and her eyes were turned upon the floor in thoughtful mood, while images of the past and dreams of a delicious future floated through her mind. She was alone, yet not alone, for in her fancy she saw the youthful Selim at her feet, a welcome suppliant. His loving glances shot through her memory, and the thrilling touch of his hand, so well remembered, while hanging over D'Arville in the ante-room of the palace, again recurred to her mind, and she felt within warm hope sending its happy influence through her frame.

'Selim,' she sighed, in Arabic, 'why art thou not ere?'

A whisper met her raptured ear :

'Selim is here, bright star of Palmyra, Selim is near me.'

She raised her eyes, and there, just kneeling at her feet, the form of Selim bent in love, and as he took her hand and pressed it to his ruby lips, he said :

'Fair Ida, disdain me not, spurn me not. I love thee dearly. Thou art dearer to me than his desert, more to the ranger of the winged steed, thou art fairer to me than the sunny valleys of my own smiling land, dearer to the sons of Ben Istam. Thou art all to me. O beautiful Ida, look in smiles upon him who bends his knees to thy feet a suppliant for thy favor; tell me that I am remembered in thy thoughts. But why should I ask, when the softly-lisp'd accents of my name fell on my ears but now? You do, you do love me, dearest, dearest Ida.'

The blushing maiden suffered him to retain her hand, although her eyes remained modestly drooped towards the floor. He covered it with kisses, and then, passing his arm around her waist, clasped her for a moment to his bosom.

The light of joy beamed brighter from her eye—the blush deepened upon her cheek, but she lingered in his embrace; she, the proud belle of the Palmyrene court, in the embrace of a Turcoman, one of her country's dreaded foes.

‘Say that you love me; tell me that I am not
useful to you, flower of Palmyra, light of my eyes;
give me a word, a glance, to tell the fond truth, and
the token shall be forever cherished in my memory.’

For an instant the light of love flashed from her eyes into his own, as she tremblingly raised them, and again veiled their loving glance with her silken lashes.

‘May the blessings of paradise be yours, fair Ida, and the dews of prosperity fall forever on thy gentle head. O, will you not share with me the throne of Ben Istam and my father’s realm? Thousands of maidens shall attend your every wish, tens of thousands of the bravest sons of Istam shall defend your every step, and your nod shall be life or death to millions. Will you not fly with me on my desert steed to the land of the rose and the laurel? Tell me, dear love—tell me, delight of my soul, and keep me not in suspense.’

As Selim concluded this impassioned appeal, the Lady Ida’s face became painfully agitated, as if some severe struggle was going on in her mind; and then rising with determined air, she retreated a few steps, and thus addressed him:

‘Selim, it cannot be. Dearly as I love you—and now, at the moment I am about ordering you to quit me, it would be selfish in me to deny it—dearly as I love you, I cannot be yours. I am a Christian maiden, brought up to abhor your religion, your race and your customs; you are a Turcoman and a Mahomedan, trained from infancy to the bloody task of destroying the soldiers of the cross—taught to consider woman of no apparent value other than a mere toy to pass away an idle hour or two with, and then coop her up in your closely-guarded harems, to sigh away a life of captivity—’

‘Nay, maiden, hear me, I pray you, and doom not one you love to a fate worse than captivity, darker than death,’ interrupted Selim, eagerly and passionately.

‘Do not interrupt me, for it is in vain. True, you have, in the case of your sister Azalie, departed from your usual rule in bringing her into the presence of your sex, but that was an exception, and doubtless matter of policy. I consider woman as ordained to make the life of her husband happy, to mould society, and be equal with her lord. Therefore, and also for the reason that your people and mine are bitter enemies, we must part, inevitably and at once.’

‘Maiden,’ exclaimed Selim, ‘why should you be so cruel? Why should you utter such piercing words to wound my heart? I am not your enemy, and for your sweet sake, I shall ever be the advocate of your people at my father’s court. Do not banish me forever. Tell me, at least, that I may seek you again in a month or more, and I will leave you contented, and revel in the hope thus held out to me!’

‘Why should this be so? It is best for both that we should never meet again, if we cannot be united,’ said Ida, as the tears came into her resolute but loving eyes.

‘Why, do you ask? Because it will save the soul of him you love from destruction, and light his dark course with the morning star of hope. Gem, fairer than the East can boast, refuse me not this boon, this parting request, and I will call on Allah to bless thee forever and ever.’

Ida pondered a moment on the request of the youth, and then replied, in a half-mournful tone of voice:

‘Be it as you say, but not so soon. Three months must intervene ere you see me again, and in that time it may be that changes may give you more cause for hope than we—than you at present have. Adieu.’

The Lady Ida held out her hand to him, but Selim folded her to his breast, imprinted on her lips a last, fond kiss, and murmuring in the ear of the blushing maiden a few fond sentences, he tore himself away, as approaching footsteps echoed along the corridor, threw over his shoulders a long cloak, and placing on his head a peasant's hat, stepped through the window and disappeared.

Ida watched his course along the ledge without, till he reached the tower-stairs, descended them, and vanished beneath the arched gateway of the castle. She then drew her curtains, called her maidens to disrobe her, and was soon slumbering upon her couch, dreaming of change, and union with the loved one of her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

*Selim's surprise. The flying Moslem. Hafed's recovery.
The princess Azalie. Selim's solitary ride by moon-
light. The haunted castle. A daring adventure.*

WHEN Selim left Lady Ida, after passing out of the castle gate, he crossed the street to a shady nook opposite the lordly Cretolian mansion, where he had fastened his trusty steed, and loosing the bridle clasps, mounted and rode slowly along in the moonlight, on his way to the Saracen quarters, which, however, he was destined not to reach that night.

As he thus proceeded, wrapt in meditation upon the events of the last hour, and lost in ecstatic thought at the idea of having gained the love of the peerless Lady Ida, he imagined he heard a strange and unusual sound echoing through the midnight air, and listening attentively, distinguished the uproar of human voices, and the ringing of steel against steel.

Putting his horse to the trot, he moved rapidly forward, and as he neared the street of palms, the lilies or war-cries of Alla-il-Allah! fell distinctly on his ear, mingled with the well-remembered shouts of St. John

and victory. These sounds ceased as he reached the avenue, and in their place the clattering of hoofs coming fiercely forward startled him, and as he turned the corner he found himself borne away irresistibly by the rush of the flying Moslem. In vain he tried to curb the noble animal whose back he bestrode, in vain attempted to turn his head aside ; with the bit grasped firmly between his teeth, the powerful beast followed the impulse of the moment, and fled with the flying.

‘Sons of Ben Istam, cease your coward flight. Knaves, ’tis Selim would wake you to your senses. May the ban of Eblis fall upon your traitorous souls, if you draw not the rein. Slaves, I tell you, stop. Why should you thus rush heedlessly along when none pursue ?’

This appeal produced the desired effect, for the Moslem gradually reined in their chargers, and gathered around the young prince Selim to await his further pleasure.

‘What meaneth all this, and wherefore your coward flight ? Speak truly, or by the beard of Mahomet you shall dearly rue it.’

The aga, or captain of a hundred, replied with a salaam :

‘Your brother, the prince Hafed, may he live a thousand years, was not satisfied with giving the black knight a fall in the palace, but must needs attack him and his troop of devils near their quarters, and the consequence is, that with the help of Eblis, the black knight and his demon followers have sent us away with the loss of a third of our number, the best of our veterans.’

‘And where is Hafed ? is he among the fallen ?’ asked Selim.

‘The prince hath fallen, but we know not whether he be dead or not. Yonder he lieth, across the back of that warrior’s steed.’

‘Ha, he moveth,’ said Selim, ‘take him off quickly, and bring hither in thy helmet water from yon trough.’

The prince Hafed was lifted from in front of the soldier who had borne him away from the fray, and seated upon a bench in the porch of a neighboring mansion: water was poured plentifully over his head, and soon he was able to take a draught from the helmet, of the refreshing liquid, after which he revived sufficiently to say, in a faint tone of voice:

‘Selim, Azalie is still at the palace. Hadst thou not better take one half of the troop and seek her? May my star be dim, but that blow the Frankish dog dealt me had well nigh crushed my skull, but thanks to the strength of my helmet rim, I can still live to be avenged upon him for it. Had he struck an inch or two higher, he would have saved himself much trouble.’

‘I will go for Azalie,’ answered Selim. ‘In the meanwhile, sons of Ben Istam, form with your lances the warrior’s litter, and convey the prince Hafed to our resting-place, for he is still too weak to move alone. Thirty of you, follow me.’

Thus saying, Selim turned his steed, and followed by a number of the Turcoman warriors made the best of his way to the palace of the king of Palmyra. Here, in the ante-room, he found the princess Azalie patiently waiting her escort.

‘Brother Selim, how pleased am I you have come at last. My endurance has been almost exhausted, and I have been in such a state of trembling anxiety ever since Hafed left me, that if you could have known my

thoughts you would have pitied me ; for I knew, by his determined words and bearing, and fierce looks, when we parted, that he meditated something dreadful.'

'Calm yourself, flower of the Euphrates,' said Selim, as he led her and her attendant maiden to their horses, and assisted them to mount, 'calm yourself, for Hafed is not hurt. A slight bruise from the sword of that Christian knight stunned him, but his armor proved good, and he will be able to be in the saddle, again, ere the dawn shall call the nobles of Palmyra to their senate-chamber.'

'I am joyful, but—I—you—have you heard—'

Azalie seemed much confused, and stopped abruptly.

'What is it that embarrasses you, sweet sister—what would you know ? Let us ride ahead, and when alone, you may ask Selim freely what you will, and he will answer,' said the prince.

'That—that Frankish knight—is he—has he fallen ?' asked Azalie.

For an instant, surprise held Selim silent ; lifting the edge of his sister's veil suddenly, he looked upon her blushing cheek, and read in her downcast eyes a tale that filled him with emotion, and then, as he dropped the tissue, he exclaimed, in a deep, impressive tone :

'Azalie, deny it not—you love this Christian knight.'

'Nay, nay. I did not say so,' cried Azalie, 'but he saved my life, and I feel grateful to him. Nothing more—nothing more.'

'Azalie, you cannot deceive me ; it is useless to attempt it. You love this foe of your kindred, this warrior, brought up to hate, and trained to destroy our race,' said Selim, fiercely, 'but dare to think—'

Azalie raised her veil, and sending a searching glance through his eyes into his very heart, inquired, in a meaning tone :

‘ And is the prince Selim faultless in this respect ? Does he know of no Christian maiden for whose love he would give all he possesses ? Does his heart not thrill with the tender passion, and has not the fair flower of the house of Cretolius left its fragrance in his bosom ? Selim, I have seen all, I have watched the warm gaze with which you regarded her, and I know that you love her ; I have caught the modest glances she bestowed in return, and I read in her starry orbs the love she felt for you. And, Selim, can you blame Azalie for that of which you yourself are a participant ? ’

The eyes of Selim fell before those of Azalie, and as she concluded, he extended his hand toward her, with the single word, ‘ Sister.’

Azalie dropped her hand in his, murmuring, ‘ Brother.’

It was enough. The secrets of each were known to the other, and they now reposed in each other the utmost confidence ; and Selim determined to aid in gaining the happiness of Azalie, even though it should be needful to surrender her to the keeping of the black-mailed foeman of Ben Istam.

For awhile they rode in silence, Azalie feeling too timid to repeat the question she had at first put to Selim, respecting the safety of the gallant knight who had saved her life. The prince, however, was not long in divining the nature of her thoughts, and with a delicacy natural to his kind heart, unasked, informed her :

‘ The brave warrior of the snowy plume fought nobly against Hafed and his band, and it was his warlike arm that struck our brother down. Hafed received his

deserts, and glad am I that he hath met with this reverse ; for his ingratitude towards the preserver of my dear Azalie merits no kindness from me, neither does the hatred I have perceived growing upon his heart towards me latterly permit me to sympathize with him in his defeat. Had I been present, I assure you this attempt would not have been made, for I would have withdrawn from his band those warriors under my immediate command, and thus made his numbers too few to allow of making the attack. The Frankish chieftain escaped the fray unharmed. May the blessing of the prophet rest upon his head !

‘Thank you, my brother, for your sympathy. But tell me what will the lords of Palmyra say to this ? Think you it will not bring us into trouble ?’ asked Azalie.

‘Nay,’ answered Selim, ‘they will trouble themselves but little about a combat in which the followers of Mahomet have been defeated and put to flight, no farther than to glory in the momentary fall of the Lion of Turkestan. By the beard of the prophet, but I could lead our followers back to the fray, and teach these nobles that the arms of our race may yet be invincible. I could die on the scene of battle, to wipe away this stain on the valorous fame of Ben Istam, the dauntless tribe.’

‘No, brother,’ said Azalie, imploringly, ‘think not of it. Do not let your pride overcome your affection for your sister, or your love for the Lady Ida, so far as to permit you to seek the destruction of the race of her you love, and the death of him I—’

‘Why do you stop, dear sister ? fear not to confide in me,’ said Selim, changing the proud, stern tone in

which he had spoken, to one of gentler import. 'You would say, the death of him you love. Nay, that I never could, for the debt of gratitude with which I am overwhelmed, when I gaze on you, and think that but for him, the pride of Ben Istam's mighty tribe, the joy of the house of Othman would now have been in the seventh heaven among the houris of paradise, and our tent would have been clothed in mourning,—when all this crosses my mind, I feel towards the brave D'Arville as a brother.'

'Thus it should be, Selim; thus should the princes of Ben Istam regard those who have won their grateful remembrance. But, brother, we are near home, and must soon meet Hafed, whose reproaches for being absent from the fray, and for assisting the bruised knight in the palace, will, I know, sting you to madness; but do not, I pray you, draw your scimitar, lest I should mourn one brother fallen by the hands of another.'

'Sister,' said Selim, fondly, 'you are ever thus, ever mindful of me, ever thoughtful of my interests, and I cannot repay you other than by acceding to your request. Though his taunts should be more painful than the torments of Eblis, yet will I not touch my weapon, and in my endurance you will find a proof of my affection for you.'

'Selim, how kind you are. The blessings of Heaven rest on you.'

'And the glories of paradise rest on your head a thousand years, sweet sister; but now we are here, I will see you enter in safety, and then pass an hour in the moonlit streets, for I feel no inclination to rest at present, after the events of the evening. My guards

may also retire to their apartments, as I need no attendants.'

Thus saying, Selim turned his steed, and rode leisurely along the street of palms, till he came to a broad avenue crossing it at right angles, the street of Artanius, down which he proceeded, alone and unattended, revolving in his mind the best plan of obtaining the hand of the dear being to whom he had pledged his love, and recalling to his memory the soft words of affection which she had spoken in answer to his passionate appeal. Absorbed in these delicious reveries, he noticed not the surrounding objects, and suffered the rein to hang idly in his hand, while the charger which bore him took his own course over the pavement.

Full half an hour had elapsed in this manner, when the horse of Selim stumbled over a clod of turf, and nearly fell. Selim started from his waking dreams, drew the rein tight, and as the animal recovered a firmer footing, the prince looked around, and to his surprise found himself traversing an unfrequented road near the city walls, passing amid neglected gardens and ruined edifices, the remains of Palmyra's former grandeur, dim memorials of a glorious past.

The moon's cold rays fell on a gigantic pile, which stood in silent gloom at the roadside, the massive turrets of which shot high up into the still air, and looked in dim sorrow over the desolate scene. The broad expanse of the dark stone of which the walls were built, showed no gleam of light through loophole or casement, and the dry moat and broken gate told of unnoticed decay. As Selim gazed, he felt a sense of awe cross his mind, which to his daring soul was a pleasurable sense, though to one less adventurous, less

fond of the marvellous, the scene would have been replete with terror. Suddenly a single light gleamed through an embrasure, high, high up in one of the old towers, and then disappeared.

‘Ha!’ said Selim, ‘and is this the haunted palace of which the sons of Palmyra stand so much in dread? Is it of this edifice that the neighboring traders in the street of palms have told so many and such wondrous tales of fearful import to the warriors of my band? Is it from hence that groans and shrieks issue forth at the witching midnight hour, at times, and startle the chance traveller from his propriety? Is this the scene of the wild legends which have thrilled many hearts with the spirit of adventure so often of late? Now, Allah be praised, I shall have a chance to put my mettle to the proof, and see if these strange stories of the haunted palace of an extinct line of nobles be true.’

With these words, Selim put spurs to his steed, and soon reached the front of the grim building, over the mouldering drawbridge of which he urged his way. He still wore the Palmyrene cloak and hat, which he had donned before he made his way to the boudoir of the Lady Ida, and its ample folds effectually hid from view the shining corslet, the gemmed doublet, and the glittering arms of a Moslem prince.

‘How strangely sounds my horse’s hoof upon this echoing bridge. Ha! it is the haunted palace; I know it by the tiger’s head carved over the massive arch, and the brown portcullis standing at the side. How damp this arched way seems, as if it had collected the moisture of centuries to chill the heart of the daring one who should first tread beneath its dropping ceil,

and bid him turn ere—Ha! what ails thee, Leila? said he, as the snowy steed on which he was mounted shied, and pricked its ears in terror; ‘what ails thee? dost thou see aught in yon dark nook to cause thee thus to give back? That is no shadow! by Eblis, that is no shadow. Come forth, my trusty blade, and we will sound the recess with thy shining length, and see what it will bring to light. Ha! have I stirred you?’

As Selim said this, his scimitar was torn violently from his hand, and thrown upon the ground, and the next instant a gigantic figure bounded from the dim nook, glided away across the wide court-yard, and disappeared within a doorway leading into a tower, on the opposite side of the building.

‘Now, may Mahomet aid me,’ said he, as he stooped to pick up his weapon; ‘but that was nothing of this world. Such motion—by my beard, it moved as swiftly over the ground as Azrael, the dark angel of death. How my heart bounds with excitement, and anticipation of further wonders. May the ghoules of Turkestan seize me, but here is a tinge of blood upon my trusty scimitar, as if fingers of flesh and blood had grasped its potent edge. This is encouragement enough to seek farther.’

Leading his horse to the edge of the inner gate, he fastened him to a staple in the wall, and then crossed the court and entered at the turret door, through which he had witnessed the disappearance of the gigantic form.

Here he found himself in a square chamber, from which two doors opened on either hand, and in front, a narrow winding stair led upward. Selim tried the

fastenings of both doors, which were locked, and knowing that the dark figure could not have come out again without being perceived, the prince drew his cloak closely around his left arm, and with his scimitar in his right hand, resolutely ascended the winding stairs.

The dimness was such, that he had to feel his way, step by step, save occasionally, when he passed a loop-hole where the moonlight streamed in and made darkness visible. Now and then, he came to short landing-places, or platforms, on the stairs, from which doors had originally opened, all of which he tried and found fast. Step after step, he made his adventurous way, step after step, he rose upward through the gloom, step after step, in endless duration, till his brain seemed almost to reel with the continued turnings of the staircase, and the stifling closeness of the atmosphere oppressed his breathing.

Soon, however, the moonlight streamed down upon his head from above, from the entrance opening from the topmost stair upon the roof of the turret, and soon the pure fresh breezes of heaven delighted the senses of Selim, as he inhaled their delicious softness, and stood upon the summit of the tower. In surprise he looked around him :

‘How is this ? no one here ? and I tried every door I passed as I came up. Mahomet help me, but this is strange. I shall begin to believe these peasant stories if such an adventure happens to me again. Now there is nothing for me but to descend, and see if I can see aught from without the castle walls, but ere I proceed to do so, I will enjoy this beautiful prospect a few moments.

From the high turret whence he gazed, Selim could see over all Palmyra, save that small portion hidden by the eminence in which stood the royal palace, two miles distant from him. At least one third of the space within the walls was occupied by ruined dwellings and neglected gardens, most of which were in the immediate vicinity and close beneath him, and as he looked forth, Selim felt his heart expand with the beauty of the scene. His eye sought, among the rest, the palace of Cretolius, and he almost fancied he could see the light burning within the boudoir of Ida, but in that he was mistaken, for she had retired full an hour before, soon after he had left her.

A loud sound from the court of the palace now attracted his attention, and looking over the parapet of the tower, Selim saw, far below him, his snowy steed prancing and bounding as if in fear, and evidently attempting to break the bridle which fastened him. The cause of his alarm was apparent, for close beside him, Selim distinguished, near the gate, a dim form, motionless as a statue, who appeared to be regarding the animal with surprise, or at least, Selim so judged, as the dark arms were raised in the attitude denoting that feeling.

As Selim looked, the figure moved toward the animal, as if to seize its head, when the charger broke away suddenly, and rushed out the gate and over the drawbridge with clattering hoofs. The prince stopped but a moment to lift a stone from the ruined parapet, and topple it over the edge, whence it went crashing downward with a terrific sound. Ere it had reached the pavement below, the adventurous **Turcoman** was on his way down the winding stairs again, descending

apidly as the darkness which prevailed within would w.

At last he reached the bottom, and emerged into the courtyard again, scimitar in hand. Carefully and slowly he picked his way across the area, listening intently to every sound, and reached the place where he had fastened his steed. To his astonishment he could find no traces of the broken bridle, and he hastily made his exit from the gate, intending to follow the runaway charger, and afterwards return to the city and continue his explorations.

Proceeding out into the road, he found the traces of the animal, and following them for some distance, came to a point leading to a vast enclosure adjacent to the city.

As the animal had evidently entered this enclosure, he continued to trace the marks of the peculiar tread worn by the horses of the Turcoman emir's householdsmen, and after an hour's search discovered him, alone, in a corner, covered with perspiration, and shivering with a tremor from head to foot.

As soon as the faithful steed perceived his master, he uttered a whinny of delight, and advanced to meet him. The prince addressed a few words of encouragement to him, patting him fondly on the shoulder, and led him back towards the road again. On examining the broken bridle, a piece was discovered to be missing about a foot in length—but whither could it have gone? It was not in the road, nor in the castle court, for the prince would have seen it, had it been. Could the thief figure have taken it, and if so, what was his object? what could he want of it?

The prince, on reaching the road, took the Palmyra cloak from his shoulders, and laid it over the back

of the steed, that he might not catch cold by standing still after his hot run. Mounting, he directed his course back toward the haunted palace, and on arriving there rode round the outside to discover from what window the light he had seen issued, and endeavoring to find some indications by which he might be guided in his farther search.

None appearing, the richly-dressed Selim, divested of his cloak, led his charger into the palace yard. After a short search, he succeeded in finding a room on the ground floor, in which he might secure his horse by closing the door, till he should again need him, thus preventing his again escaping.

This being accomplished, the prince strode up the broad staircase leading to the great hall, and after looking around to see if all was still in the court-yard while his arms and magnificent dress gleamed in the moonbeams, he boldly opened the door and entered!

CHAPTER VIII.

in the senate-chamber of Palmyra. A stormy session. D'Arville's disappointment. The maniac. The knight's defiance. Hafed's threat.

THE rosy tinge of morn appeared in the east, and slowly the sun rose above the horizon, bringing a day edged with importance to the interests of Palmyra, a day which Fate expanded his sable wings, and dropped his sombre folds over the senate-house. And when the sun, at his meridian, poured a golden flood of splendour through the palaces of that fair city, his rays could not warm the noble hearts oppressed with sadness, or dispel the gloomy shades of anticipated evil which held sway in the bosoms of the bravest in the realm.

Within the walls of the senate-chamber, the noble lords and barons of Palmyra sat, in seats of most luxurious softness, engaged in anxious conjectures as to the nature of the communication they expected to receive from the envoy of the knights of St. John, to hear whose message they were now especially assembled, according to the order of the monarch.

The walls of the chamber were plain, but the ceiling, supported by twenty exquisitely carved pillars of Grecian marble, glowed above their heads in all the magnificence of burnished gold, and sparkling gems. The windows, high and broad, were covered with partially drawn curtains of the most ethereal blue, clasped at the sides with silver, and from their tops projected inwards a broad capital or cap-stone of marble, elegantly wrought, over which the silver fastenings mingled in contrast with the blue folds of the curtain, making a fit hiding-place for the daring spy who should chance to seek a knowledge of the secrets of state-policy discussed by the noble rulers of the kingdom.

At the upper end of the chamber stood the magnificent throne of the king, and opposite, a cushioned seat of beautiful embroidery marked the place to be occupied by the envoy of St. John when he should appear. Twenty-one lords and a hundred barons filled the hall, clothed in their senatorial robes, and without the doors a hundred of the imperial legion held strict guard, while a thousand of the guardsmen, in full armor, awaited in the courtyard the orders of their sovereign.

A movement among the guards attracted the attention of the senators, and simultaneously two doors were thrown open, through one of which appeared the king and his ministers, and through the other entered the Lord Cretolius and Everard, accompanied by D'Arville, the knight-envoy. All rose as they entered, and remained standing till they had taken their seats. Everard, who was, in virtue of his heirship to the honors of Lord Cretolius, a baron, sought his allotted place among the minor order of senators.

The doors having been shut, and the guards forbidden to admit any others, the herald of the king arose, at a given signal, and after sounding his bugle thrice to attract attention and command silence, as was customary, spoke thus :

‘ Chosen ones of Palmyra, hear ye the words of King Iscora, ruler of this mighty realm. Ye have been gathered to hear the mission sent to our great monarch by Grevana of Cyprus, that dauntless soldier of the silver cross, and advise thereon as best suiteth you in honor and in judgment. Percy D’Arville, knight grand cross of the order of St. John, the king giveth thee a welcome—and by his pleasure you have permission to speak. Arise, and declare to us the words of thy chief, Grevana of Cyprus.’

As the herald concluded, D’Arville arose, and said :

‘ Most potent majesty of Palmyra, and ye noble senators : my mission is of boundless importance to you and yours. It is a mission, your decision on which involves either safety or ruin to this fair city. I am empowered to treat with you of a concert of action against the Turcoman and the Saracen ; a concert in which will join the Greek emperor with his mighty armies and countless treasures of gold ; the gallantry of St. John, with their well-trained knights and black-nailed warriors, invincible on the stormy field and unshrinking in the contest ; and the soldiers of the kingdom of Palestine, led by their most renowned princes and most powerful leaders. Besides these, a host of the chivalry of Europe wait but our call, to pour into our aid in all the panoply of glorious might.’

‘ And what,’ said the king, ‘ would you have us to do ? Take part in this wild scheme, and bring down

upon our heads the overwhelming numbers of the Mogul conqueror, and the bold riders of the sultan of Iconium ?”

‘ You are in happy ignorance of passing events. Know you not, that on the death of the great Mogul, his boundless empire has become broken in pieces ?’ asked the knight. ‘ Know you not, that the emirs and chiefs of the tribes have declared their separate independencies, and that the Saracen power is also destroyed in fact, though in name it still exists ? Yet this is all true. But I came to warn you of a more dangerous foe,—of the insidious Turcoman, the sultan of Iconium, whose many emirs are clamorous to be led against Palmyra.’

‘ The sultan of Iconium,’ exclaimed the king, ‘ is our warmest friend, and you know little when you hint at his being our enemy. He may be an enemy of St. John, as I should judge from his sending hither the princes Hafed and Selim, the sons of the emir of the tribe of Ben Istam, to ask of us the delivery of your fugitive band of knights.’

‘ I tell you, by the patron of our order,’ earnestly exclaimed D’Arville, ‘ you are mistaken in this, and you will, ere long, if you take not my warning, find that your confidence is misplaced. The sultan of Iconium is even now intriguing with his neighbors, and making secret preparations to bring against you his armed bands, in answer to the prayers of his warlike princes, and emirs.’

‘ If he comes, we must purchase peace,’ said the king, in a determined voice ; ‘ for we cannot oppose him, and must do the best to avert the threatened danger.’

‘Purchase peace?’ ‘Descend to bribery?’ ‘Never, never!’ were the words echoed from different parts of the hall, as many of the senators rose to speak in answer to this unexpected proposition of the king.

‘I have said it,’ replied the monarch, sternly. ‘My Lord Morden, since you continue standing, methinks you would say something on the subject.’

‘Yes, and what I say I feel assured will meet with a response from the bosom of every true Palmyrene. Ere we degrade ourselves so far as to offer the accursed Saracen a bribe, ere we thus stoop to purchase that safety which our own right arms should achieve, ere we do this, may our bones lie bleaching on the burning sand beyond our eastern wall, may every stone be toppled from its place in this fair edifice, may every wife be a widow, every mother childless, and every child an orphan. Ere I shall consent to this detestable act, my blood shall moisten the floor of this chamber, and my last breath be spent in defending our good fame. Death, rather than safety purchased at the expense of honor!’

Loud cries of applause rent the air as Lord Morden concluded; the king rose from his seat with an angry glance in his eye, and the red flush of passion tinging his features, though his compressed lips were bloodless. Standing a moment to collect himself, he said in a bitter tone of voice:

‘And is there no other here to keep the fire of anarchy in a flame by the moving eloquence of his breath, no other to defy a foe who is yet far away?’

‘There is—the Baron Cretolius can echo from his heart the words of the noble Morden, and join him hand in hand in his noble resolve—in defying the ene-

my of our race—and yielding up our lives rather than our honor.'

Still louder rang the cries of applause, as Everard reseated himself after the delivery of his opinion, and still darker grew the brow of the king, as he asked :

'Most valiant sirs, which of you can tell me how we are to meet the foe whose enmity you thus seek, and where we shall find the hosts we need to meet them, or the resources necessary for the maintenance of our legions ?'

'I, for one,' said the aged Lord Cretolius, 'can bring into the field the gallant legion of Cretolians, the three thousand retainers of our house, and for a year supply from my coffers every want. My son, the Baron Everard, shall lead them to the strife, and perish rather than yield the victory.'

'And is it so?' cried the king; 'am I deserted by all in whom I placed confidence? and is the policy which has carried us in safety through the storms of the last century, through the fearful scenes of the crusaders, and which saved us from the destroying Mogul—is this policy to be trodden under foot as useless, and thrown aside in this perilous hour?'

'Nay,' replied one of the barons, 'we said not so. All we have declared is, that we would rather die than stoop to bribe the sultan of Iconium. The necessity for that death, however, has not yet come, for even if the knowledge imparted us by this gallant envoy of St. John is true, which I doubt, we know not but some internal commotion of foreign war may occupy the Turcomans and Saracens, ere they find time to bring their tribes against us.'

'Another!' exclaimed the king. 'Another to say

die rather than consent to a peaceful settlement of our difficulties, by the power of gold. Are ye all traitors? Let me know, I implore you. Let those in whose bosoms the sentiments of the four nobles who have spoken find an answering echo, arise, that I may know on what I can depend.'

In answer to this appeal three-fourths of the nobles and barons present sprang to their feet, and stood in silence, gazing upon the monarch, with firmness and pride in their features.

'So be it, then. Blame not me,' said the king. Blame not me when the Turcoman hordes shall gather round your walls; blame not me when the shrieks of famishing children and the wail of starving wives and mothers shall break upon your ears; blame not me when the besiegers shall enter your gates, and through your kennels blood shall flow like water, and in your streets the bodies of Palmyra's bravest and best shall be piled in heaps; when her noble sons and daughters shall become ghastly carcases in the highways, food for the canker worm or the ravening vulture; when the smoke of burning mansions shall hover over this beautiful city like a funeral pall. Blame not me then, but hide your own faces in bitter consciousness of having incurred these calamities by your own wilful perverseness and stubborn pride of heart.'

The king, whose breath was exhausted by the vehemence with which he had uttered these words, threw himself upon the seat of the throne, and covering his face with his hands, remained silent.

'We will not blame you,' cried Lord Morden, 'for ere these things can come upon us, many of us will sleep in the land of the foe, and die before the walls of

Iconium. Think you we will sit idly here, and permit the sultan to hem us in? No, but we will marshal our hosts, and with flowing banners and shining steel, march forth to meet the red-robed sons of Turkestan and the Euphrates, and give them battle on their own despotic soil.'

Again a shout of applause shook the pillars, and echoed, along the vaulted ceiling, high above which a demon laugh seemed to ring in the astonished ears of the nobles. Each looked around to see whence it proceeded, but none could tell.

'Nobles of Palmyra, what answer give you to the proposal of my chief, Grevana of Cyprus?' asked D'Arville.

The king raised his head from his hands:

'Sir Percy Arville, you have heard the words of our nobles; you have listened to the declaration of their suicidal intentions; and do you not know what your answer will be? If you do not, I cannot tell you more than this, that we will not join you in your warlike scheme, as our attention must be turned to securing our safety by peaceable means; for it is not now with us as in the days of Zenobia, when our walls held millions of inhabitants, and hundreds of thousands marched forth from our gates to the conquest of Egypt, Arabia and Persia. Now, but fifty thousand men will answer our call to arms, and the four millions of our people of the times of the ancient queen, have dwindled to a tenth part at the present day.'

'This, then, is my answer,' replied D'Arville, bitterly. 'Well, then, in the name of St. John, I wish to know whether you intend to deliver my brave band into the hands of the emissaries of the sultan? You



HAFED IN THE SENATE-CHAMBER OF PALMYRA.



Imperious demand of the Turcoman prince of the king of Palmyra.

would mate with the Saracen in remaining neutral while your friends are at war with him, yet let me warn you against attempting to purchase peace by such an act of perfidy as the betrayal of my brave knights ; for if you do, our allied powers will sweep you from the earth ere we meet the eastern sultans.'

' I care not,' said the king, angrily ; ' let them come.'

' Knight of the Silver Cross,' said one of the nobles, ' fear not for your noble troop, for there is scarcely a senator present that would not die, rather than suffer your Christian warriors to be delivered to this destruction.'

At this moment a lieutenant of the guard entered, after tapping loudly at the door with his sword-hilt, and speaking aloud to the king, said :

' My liege, the prince Hafed waiteth without, and demands instant admittance to your hearing. Is it your will that he should be admitted ?'

' It is,' briefly replied the king.

The rush of footsteps was heard in the corridor, and the Moslem prince, with demoniac anger visible in his countenance, entered, his hair floating wildly round his shoulders, unconfined by a turban or other covering.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

' Dogs, hounds, slaves, give me my brother ! Where have you put the prince Selim ? Speak, whither have you carried the dauntless son of Ben Istam ? and in what dungeon of your accursed fortress have you placed him ? The fiends of Eblis seize you, if you do not answer truly. Doth no one say aught ? Now, by the beard of Mahomet, King Iscora, if you find him not

ere night-fall, your head shall pay the penalty. Ay, frown, and show your teeth, dogs of Mahoun, slaves of the Frank, for you dare not bite. I have said it, his head shall fall for that of Selim, and if the sun goes down ere my eyes look upon my brave brother, you may look to see the black standard of the prophet floating on the mountain summits, and the snowy steeds of Ben Istam's mighty tribe coursing around your walls, while from over the desert the countless thousands of Iconium's great sultan shall gather for your destruction. Vile tools of a Frankish dog, I have sworn it, and by the tomb of the prophet it shall be.'

Again that startling laugh echoed through the hall, and its fearful sound sent a thrill of terror to every heart. Even Hafed, the lion of Turkestan, stood in silent amazement.

'Yes, Saracen, yes,; it shall be; you shall have your brother, when the knaves of the desert are flying before the victor nobles of Palmyra. I will meet you on the battle-field, and give him to you; but you will not know the snowy skull, you will not believe they are his bones, for I will scrape with my fingers every vestige of humanity from them. I will give his flesh to the memory of my wife and child, and with his blood wipe away a score from the tablet of my revenge. Ha! ha! ha! go, Saracen, go, or I will add thee to my victims.'

At the first part of this wild sentence, every eye had followed the direction of the sound, and there, high up on the stone ledge projecting from the top of a window, half-hidden by the ample curtain which flowed from just above, stood the form of the maniac Marontius, from whose dark and sun-burnt visage gleamed his

glaring eye-balls like stars in the night, and his white teeth seemed to glisten with exultation.

As they looked, he drew his gigantic form from its hiding-place, and seizing the edge of the curtain, let himself down gradually, till he reached the floor, after which, he strode towards the Saracen Prince Hafed, and stood in front of him, gazing into his face with baleful looks of hatred. In his hand he held a piece of strong Morocco leather, which had evidently once formed part of a bridle, and bore, stamped in its texture, a number of Arabic characters.

The prince stepped back into the middle of the guardsmen of the imperial legion, and drew his scimitar, evidently mistrusting the benevolent intentions of the maniac.

‘Ha! ha! vain boaster, where is thy vaunted courage? Poor fool, I will not touch thee, but let thee live to bring hither thy hordes to glut my vengeance. There is my guerdon.’ Saying this, the maniac threw the bridle on the floor, and darted swiftly away, through the open door, overthrowing several of the guards in his impetuous course, and was soon in the open air.

When order was restored, the king caused the door to be again shut, and addressed Hafed, who, having recovered from the surprise into which the appearance of the maniac had thrown him, was now pacing the lower end of the room like a tiger impatient of confinement.

‘Prince Hafed, you say the noble Selim hath disappeared. When did you last see him?’

‘Last night, he left the princess Azalie at the door of our quarters, and rode off unattended, since when he hath neither been seen, nor—but why do you ask?’

cried Hafed, angrily, 'you who have caused him to be abducted, why do you ask where he is, or where I saw him? You know, and may my soul be forever banished from paradise, and may Eblis seize me in his demon grasp, if I do not make you feel my vengeance, ere a week hath past. Remember, I must see prince Selim ere yon sun tips with gold the summit of that distant mountain, or I shall that hour leave your detested city, and seek my warriors, who now wait but the signal to sweep you away from the face of the earth, and avenge in your blood the wrongs of the prince Selim, the pride of Ben Istam.'

'Knave of a Saracen,' cried D'Arville, 'begone with thy braggart boastings, or I will make thee feel the edge of that weapon which so nearly ended thy life a few hours since. Bring thy foemen hither, if thou darest, and I will meet thee in the bloody fray again, and see if my arm cannot strike a surer blow.'

'So be it, slave, swine-eating Frank, so be it. If your coward soul will permit you, be there where you have said, and I will revenge that blow. Nobles of Palmyra, you have heard my words—REMEMBER.'

Having said this, in a tone of voice which breathed the wildest defiance and the most ferocious hatred, the Lion of Turkestan strode proudly from the senate-chamber of Palmyra.

CHAPTER IX.

Lord of Cretolius. The knight's resolution. Selim's appearance. Hafed's departure in anger. The fight in the haunted palace. The dungeons. A discovery.

table in the festive hall of the palace of Cretolius read with delicacies, tempting to the sight and not to the taste. The luscious fruits of the East, from the gardens of Shiraz and Cyprus, and the dainty viands of an experienced oriental cuisiniere, stood at intervals upon the silver-plated cloth.

The last rays of the setting sun streamed against the red window-curtains from without. Within, lights of red wax illuminated the hall. Seated at the table engaged in conversation, were the Lady Ida and her brother, Lord Cretolius, who seemed to be anxiously waiting for the appearance of Everard and their first guest.

The countenance of the Lady Ida betrayed unusual anxiety, and her voice had a tremulous sound, as she

said that they were here, that we might know

whether this prince Selim hath been found or not, for if he is not, you say we must expect the horrors of war!"

'It is even so, my daughter,' said Lord Cretolius, sadly, 'but yet, there is still some hope that we may avert the threatened danger, by setting forth the true state of our affairs to the council of the Turcoman tribes at Iconium, of which the emir of Ben Istam, the father of the princes, is a member. Therefore, if this Hafed leaves us in anger to-night, it has been decided by our senate that Everard and myself are to be sent as ambassadors to the court of Iconium. If so, we leave at dawn to-morrow.'

On hearing this, the Lady Ida thought of the conduct of the king towards her, and spoke earnestly to her father.

'O, take me with you, send me anywhere, but do not leave me here alone again, or you will never see me more. I cannot tell you why I think so, but there is a strong impression on my mind that such will be the case.'

'Wherefore this sudden alarm, my daughter?'

'I may not tell you, now, but a year from this time you shall know all, and then you will say that my fears were well grounded,' answered Ida.

The venerable nobleman pondered an instant, and replied:

'Well, I will not seek to know your secret. Nevertheless, I dare not convey you to the Turcoman court, lest some of the emirs should take a fancy to your beauty, and carry you away from me by force, to immure you in a harem.'

'That is no more than I have good reason to expect if I stay here,' replied the Lady Ida, with a shudder.

‘Indeed! then nothing remains for me but to place you in the care of the English baron, of whose honor and courage D’Arville has often spoken,’ said Lord Cretolius; ‘but let us drop this subject, as I hear approaching footsteps.’

Everard and D’Arville now entered, and in answer to the anxious inquiries of Lord Cretolius, the knight remarked as he took a seat at the table:

‘The die is cast, nobles of Palmyra, the fate of your fair city is in the hands of your foe. Selim hath not been found, and scarce one short hour since, I saw the prince Hafed and his lovely sister Azalie, with their grim band of attendants, pass swiftly out of the eastern gate, and ere they had proceeded a mile over the desert, hundreds of their scarlet-riders appeared from every direction and joined their array.’

‘And are there no tidings of the prince Selim?’ asked Lord Cretolius, in surprise.

‘None,’ replied D’Arville. ‘The only trace we have of him is this Turcoman bridle, which the maniac Marontius left behind him in the senate-chamber, after his defiance of the prince Hafed. Everard picked it up, and as from this we judged that Selim had fallen into the hands of the maniac, we have been engaged since noon, with five hundred horsemen in scouring the city and vicinity, and have caused heralds to proclaim a reward to any one who should find him, but our efforts were unsuccessful.’

‘Have you been to the ruined tomb of king Icarus, without the city walls, where the maniac often passes his time, at this season of the year?’ asked Lord Cretolius.

‘We have,’ replied Everard, ‘and we found no

traces of the lost prince. The fragments of D'Arville's silken doublet were still there, but as nothing seemed to have been disturbed since the night of his adventure, and no fresh-spilt blood was discernible on the altar where Marontius usually immolates his victims, we have come to the conclusion that the prince is still alive, and somewhere in the city. The maniac has perhaps had no chance to convey his prisoner out of the city without discovery.'

'It is strange,' said D'Arville, 'that he will never slay his victims anywhere but at the ruined tomb. Knowing this, I have given orders that a strict watch should be kept at all the gates, and told the guards neither to permit the maniac egress or ingress.'

'Have you searched in the palace of Artanius?' asked the Lady Ida, with a tremulous voice, and a blanched cheek.

The knight gazed a moment on her pale and anxious countenance ere he replied, in a sympathizing tone:

'We have, fair lady; we have searched it from turret to courtyard, and passed through the gloomy dungeons beneath.'

'There is one place,' said Everard, suddenly, 'we have not explored, and now the thought strikes me, it is probable that we might find Selim there. I speak of the decayed castle of the Marontian family, of which the maniac is the last descendant. This palace is in a deserted neighborhood, about a mile and a half hence, and is said to be haunted. None of the lower orders of people dare approach it after nightfall alone, and strange stories are prevalent of supernatural appearances seen, and of wild shrieks often heard from thence.'

‘The very thing, by my halidom,’ exclaimed D’Arville, with sparkling eyes, ‘and the very place for an adventure. We will go thither at once, and see if we can discover aught of the missing Selim. I cannot defer it till dawn, for to-morrow I must leave you, to seek the fulfilment of the vow you heard me make a night or two ago, to restore the captive Azilla and her daughter to the maniac’s arms. I have nothing further to keep me here, for I have despatched couriers to Grevana of Cyprus, with the news of the failure of my mission to your king, and by a messenger who has just arrived thence, I hear that the emperor of the Byzantines has withdrawn from the league against the Turcomans and Saracens, so that, deprived of his powerful aid, the project falls through. What say you, Everard, shall we have a stirring adventure, in this haunted castle?’

‘I am ready,’ answered Everard; ‘when shall we start, and what retinue shall we take with us? It is dark at present, and the moon will not rise for two hours.’

‘We must be there, before then, so that we may have as many hours of moonlight as possible to prosecute our search. I will take sixty of my knights, and a hundred of the imperial legion, and a couple of troops of your retainers would also be acceptable to guard without the castle, so that if any one is within they cannot escape unseen,’ said D’Arville.

The knight and Everard, having finished their meal, arose to make their preparations, and ere an hour had elapsed the train of armed men started from the palace gate. On reaching the street of palms they were joined by the soldiers of the imperial legion, for whom

a courier had been sent, and soon after, by the knights of St. John, in full armor. The whole array passed from the avenue into the street of Artanius, down which they proceeded in the dim twilight, as rapidly as the darkness would allow.

As they neared the ruined castle, the moon gradually rose above the horizon, and lit up the desolate scene around them. All eyes were fixed upon the dark building in front, when the light which Selim had seen on the previous evening gleamed past the casement of the same turret, and disappeared, drawing exclamations of surprise from some of the troop, and of fear from others. Hurried conversations were carried on among the soldiers, many of whom, awe-struck, would have returned, had they not been rather fearful of the ridicule of their companions, which would inevitably be their portion should they display so much pusillanimity as to retire precipitately.

The troop having reached the castle, the knights and the soldiers of the legion, to the number of a hundred and sixty, trotted across the drawbridge and into the courtyard, where they dismounted and tethered their steeds to the pieces of stone lying here and there upon the ground.

D'Arville and Everard, after disposing the two hundred retainers of the house of Cretolius in convenient groups around the outer walls, entered the gate, leaving a strong guard beneath the arch, and another at a postern-entrance in the rear of the building.

The Baron Everard, followed by twenty of the order bearing lighted flambeaux, proceeded to examine one wing of the edifice, and the knight, with a like number

of his troop, entered the opposite wing. They ascended the creaking staircases, passed through dusty corridors, looked into chambers ceiled with jasper, on whose floors ancient furniture lay mouldering, broke the rusty fastenings of doors which had been closed for years, and looked forth from the high turrets, upon the moonlight scene below. Nothing of the object of their search met their eyes or ears, and both parties descended unsuccessfully to the courtyard again.

They now concluded to search the centre of the building, which as yet they had not entered, and the baron and the knight now ascended the broad flight of steps up which Selim had trodden ere he last looked upon the moonlit earth, and breathed the free air of heaven. Throwing open the door the party passed the threshold, and the massive pannelled oak swung to behind them, seemingly of its own accord, with a stunning noise. Simultaneously therewith, a strange appalling sound fell upon their ears, and the brave warriors gazed at each other in silent awe; the voice of D'Arville, however, recalled them to their self-possession.

But, in the meanwhile, an incident had occurred at the little postern-gate in the rear of the castle, rather startling in its nature. The guard posted there were carrying on a whispered conversation with each other, when their attention was attracted by a snapping sound behind them, preceded by a terrific shriek, and the next instant, heavy bolts were drawn from within, the postern-gate opened, and a tall, dark figure appeared in the shade of the arch.

Ere they recovered from their surprise, the giant form sprang forth, smote to the earth those in his

immediate path, and bounded away, howling, over the neglected gardens. A few of those who were mounted gave close chase, and were soon hidden from view by the intervening shrubbery, though the clatter of their horses' hoofs was heard for a considerable time, till at length the sound died away in the distance.

Many of the retainers gathered around the open postern, and peered fearfully into the dark recess, straining their eyes in vain to discover anything amid the gloom. All were lost in wonder and conjecture as to the nature of the apparition, some maintaining that it was the Evil One himself, while others laughed at the surmises of their more credulous and superstitious companions, and persisted in declaring that the giant figure was no other, than that of the maniac Marontius.

In the palace-hall, when the dismal echoes of the noise which had thrilled the hearts of the knights with awe had died away, D'Arville addressed Everard thus :

‘ Whence came that sound, from above or below ?’

‘ Methought it was from below,’ answered Everard.

‘ To me it seemed directly beneath our feet,’ said the knight, ‘ and therefore methinks we had better search the dungeons of the place. Call in the rest of our knights.’

This order was obeyed, and they entered the hall and gazed in silence on the faded banners displayed from the walls, banners which the warrior-lords of the house of Marontius had so often borne at the head of their followers and retainers in bloody frays and sternly contested fields. They curiously examined the family arms, a tiger's head surrounded with stars, carved here and there upon the wainscot, from which the tapestry

had long since fallen away in dusty shreds, and their chivalric hearts were oppressed with sadness as they witnessed these memorials of the decay of a noble and lordly race.

Two doors opened from each end of the hall into the corridors of the adjacent wings, and the knight looked in vain for some mode of descent to the dungeons beneath. Finally, his eye fell upon two rings set in the mouldings at the sides of the deep and commodious fire-place, and as he took hold of one and forcibly pulled it, a small panel opened, and discovered to his view heavy springs and a massive knob.

‘Ha, what have we here? By my faith, some mystery will soon be brought to light, or I am mistaken in my conjectures,’ said D’Arville, as he touched the springs, and drew the knob.

The whole side casing of the chimney seemed to open on hidden hinges, and displayed to view the entrance of a gloomy staircase of brown stone, up which the damp air of the dungeons beneath poured in a flood, causing the knight to shiver with its chilliness.

‘Now for an adventure, Everard; here is the way to the strongholds of the keep, and if I trace not its course, may my plume be dragged in the mire.’

The ring on the other side of the chimney being drawn, disclosed another aperture of a similar character.

‘What say you, D’Arville, shall I descend this staircase with twenty of the knights, and you the other, and try to discover the mysteries of this place?’ asked Everard.

‘The very thing,’ answered D’Arville, ‘we will do

so, and see what will come of it. The rest of you throw open the doors which look into the courtyard, and keep strict watch over these entrances, that we may not be accidentally fastened down ourselves. Follow, warriors of St. John.'

Having thus spoken, D'Arville led his score of knights down one staircase, while Everard and his band fearlessly descended the other. The flambeaux carried by the party of D'Arville scarcely sufficed to light the gloomy way, and as they went downwards, step by step, upon the damp and slippery stairs, the close smell of the dungeons and its noisome air fell unpleasantly on their senses.

On reaching the foot of the staircase, they found themselves in a broad space, the sides of which were invisible, as the light of their torches was insufficient to illumine the almost impenetrable darkness which surrounded them like a pall. Following the course of the wall, D'Arville tried in vain to discover aught by which he might be guided in his farther progress.

Having proceeded fifty or sixty paces, they came to the corner of the underground area, and turned into a vaulted passage, lined on either side with massive doors, of plated iron, whose rusty fastenings they in vain essayed to unloose—doors which they imagined concealed the dungeons in whose recesses brave men had wasted away in the strength of manhood, and through whose arched chambers the sighs of despairing victims had often breathed in misery and loneliness.

Leaving this vaulted passage, they entered another broad area, taking their way directly across the centre, and reached the opposite side. They followed other passages, and moved through labyrinthine mazes, till

at last their further progress was prevented by a blank stone wall. They now essayed to return, but lost their way in the gloom. For the space of twenty minutes they wandered hither and thither, shouting at the top of their voices, in hopes that the party of Everard might be at hand and hear them. No answer was returned, and they mournfully kept on their course, anxiously looking for some mode of egress. D'Arville's undaunted heart quailed not, neither did a shade of uneasiness cross his mind, for danger was his constant companion in the perilous scenes of knight-errantry, and here, in this wild and uncertain adventure, he was at home.

'In faith, these dungeons spread so widely, I think they must extend beneath the whole space covered by the castle. Fear not, brave spirits, he who hath in providence brought us hither, will not suffer us to perish. Ha! St. John help us, but that was a fearful note!'

The latter exclamation was called forth by a deep groan, similar to that which had startled them when they first entered the hall above, but whose effect, in their present situation, was, if possible, still more startling.

'Now will our adventure have a fitting denouement,' said D'Arville, as he led his men in the direction whence the sound seemed to proceed; 'let us see if we cannot, with the help of Heaven, fathom this mystery. St. John, but there is a gleam of light against yonder wall, and I think it proceeds from the mouth of that passage. Listen.'

All stood still, and held their breath. The sound of approaching footsteps, and the rattling of arms, fell on their ears, as they listened.

‘It is our comrades,’ said the knight, joyfully. ‘What, ho, St. John and victory, who cometh there, I pray?’

The voices of Everard and his band echoed back a loud reply, and the next instant they appeared in view.

‘What success, D’Arville; have you heard or seen aught?’

‘We have been lost among these vaults, and have seen nothing but the dripping walls we passed; but as for hearing, we heard again that unearthly note which first led us to descend hither, and in faith, it had an awful cadence. Ha! there it is again.’

The groan seemed to ring again close in their ears, and was followed by a faint, and hardly perceptible cry.

‘This way,’ said Everard; ‘if that voice proceeded not from this niche, then my senses deceive me. Here is an iron door, fastened on the outside, but these heavy bolts defy my utmost strength. D’Arville, you are of more powerful stature, see if you can loose them.’

The whole band of knights gathered around the little niche, and held their blazing torches aloft in the gloom, while D’Arville, applying his mailed hand to the bolts, sprang them with difficulty, and drew open the heavy door. A voice from within met his ear, supplicating in the Arabic tongue, for a cooling draught of water.

Seizing a torch from a follower, D’Arville and Everard entered, followed by a number of the knights, and there, stretched on a rude couch, lay the form of the prince Selim, bound hand and foot, with a heavy weight resting on his lower limbs, and a cord around

his forehead fastening him to the head-board. His eyes, bloodshot with long gazing at the darkness, turned imploringly to those of the knight, and as those present cut the cords which bound him, removed the weight, and raised him to a sitting position, his gratitude sparkled in his looks, and he said, in a weak voice:

‘May the blessings of Allah rest on you, Frankish knights, and the choicest gifts of Heaven fall on the head of the noble Cretolius. I have passed a weary vigil, and Allah be praised, I am restored again to freedom. But I am parched with thirst. Give me drink, I pray you.’

By D’Arville’s direction the knights raised Selim in their arms, his bruised and stiffened limbs refusing their office, and gently conveyed him to the staircase, and up into the hall, Everard leading the way.

Water having been procured from a neighboring well, near a hut occupied by a poor peasant, the prince Selim was soon sufficiently revived by the cooling fluid, as to be able to speak freely. In answer to his inquiry for his brother Hafed, and the princess Azalie, he was told the cause and manner of their departure. With a firm tone, he cried:

‘He cared not much for me, or he would not have gone without me; but I can read his intentions, and thanks to your kindness, and the blessings of Allah, I will live to share that throne which he soon intends to seize. He would gladly see me perish, for then, when our father dies, the whole power of Ben Istam’s mighty tribe would fall beneath his sway. But, by the beard of Mahomet, it shall never be while I have life.’

D’Arville listened to these words in silence and

treasured their import in his heart. Everard, who was all impatience to learn the means by which Selim had been entrapped, and through whose agency, said :

‘ Prince Selim, how camest thou hither ? I pray you tell me, that we may punish your abductors ? ’

‘ There was but one, and he a gigantic savage, of ferocious aspect. I feel too weak to tell you more at present, and if you will ask me hereafter, I will give you all the information in my power. ’

‘ So be it, brave son of Turcomania, but till then, since your troop have gone, you must take up your stay with us. At dawn, my father and myself go on a mission to your emirs at Iconium, and if you like, we will have a litter for you in our train. ’

‘ I thank you, and gladly accept your hospitality, but ere we go, let some of your troop seek my steed. I left him in the porter’s lodge, tightly confined, that he might not escape while I rambled over the castle, ’ said Selim.

The steed having been brought out, and a litter formed for Selim, the bugle of the knight called his retinue to horse. As they rode over the drawbridge, the trumpet of Everard collected the Cretolians around him, and the group who had guarded the postern-gate related their wonderful tale of the pursuit of the dark figure by their companions, who had not yet returned.

Before the armed bands of D’Arville and Everard reached the street of palms, however, they were overtaken by the detachment just mentioned, who reported that they chased the giant form for a mile, till at last he had disappeared in a narrow alley through which their steeds could not follow.

CHAPTER X.

The desert journey. The Turcoman pursuit. The knight's appearance. The Euphrates. Arthur De Montfort. Selim's fearful tale. The knight's pleasant thought.

WITHIN the palace of Lord Cretolius all were stirring at dawn. Lady Ida donned her riding-dress, Lord Cretolius and Everard clasped upon their forms the breastplate and corslet, and placed upon their brows the well-wrought helmets, from whose peaks drooped the long blue plume of their house. In the courtyard four hundred retainers were busy polishing their armor and testing the strength of their shining blades, and in the stables within the eastern wing, grooms were hastily preparing noble steeds for the desert journey of the Cretolians.

Amid the confusion incident to such a scene, but one person seemed unmoved, and that was Sir Percy D'Arville, who stood listlessly upon the platform of the broad staircase leading to the great hall, half supporting himself against the ponderous balustrade, and gazing in contemplative mood upon the active preparations going forward in the courtyard before him.

His thoughts were two-fold—first he thought of the search of the injured wife of Marontius and his daughter, on which he was on that day to start, and next his mind wandered to the scene two nights before in the king's palace, when he saved the Moslem princess, Azalie, from impending destruction. Sweetly his memory dwelt upon the beauty of the peerless maiden, while he recalled her grateful looks as she hung passive in his arms, and now he felt that he loved the daughter of Ben Istam's race with the whole strength of his enthusiastic and ardent mind.

His reverie was interrupted by the appearance of Everard and Lord Cretolius, accompanied by two esquires supporting the footsteps of Selim. The latter was unbounded in his expressions of gratitude towards D'Arville, and promised nobly to repay the obligations conferred on himself and his sister Azalie by the activity and courage of the knight. He was then assisted to a litter, borne by two powerful horses, on which he was placed in an easy position.

'Well, Sir Percy, you start not with us, then, this morning, in pursuit of the accomplishment of your vow. Did I not understand you to say, last night, that you would start on your knightly mission this morning?'

'I so intimated,' replied D'Arville, 'but, Sir Everard, I have some preparations to make, which should have been completed yesterday afternoon, had not our search for yon Turcoman prince occupied both time and attention.'

'What preparations have you to make?' asked Everard.

'You shall know hereafter,' responded D'Arville, 'but now, I pray you, direct me to some dealer in haber-



DEPARTURE OF LORD CRETOLIUS AND LADY IDA FROM PALMYRA.



Mission of Lord Cretolius and Edward to the Fairs of Iemium.—See page 113.

asheries, whom you think trustworthy, and able to keep his tongue between his teeth, that I may purchase of him some disguises.'

'The Jew Isaac is the very person you wish,' said Lord Cretolius, 'and if you desire it we will give you a guide to his quarters. You need not fear to let him know all your intentions, for he is a bitter enemy to the Saracens, and besides, he has his garret stocked with dresses of every imaginable fashion, and armor of all descriptions.'

The knight having accepted the offer of a guide, Lord Cretolius called an esquire of his troop, one Artemas, and gave him the proper orders. D'Arville stopped but an instant to pay his respects to the Lady Ida, who now appeared in her riding-dress, and then strode down the steps, saying :

'I shall not bid you farewell, for ere night shall fall, you can reach the castle of the Baron De Montfort, and I will be with you. For the present, adieu.'

Following the footsteps of Artemas, the knight made his way across the courtyard, the retainers saluting him, passed out of the gate, and was lost to sight.

By this time the retainers were in readiness, the horses were brought forth, and each holding his bridle in, stood in respectful silence, the whole drawn up in sections of ten, awaiting the signal to mount. Lord Cretolius and Everard assisted the Lady Ida to her palfrey, and then, after placing themselves in the saddles of their own chargers, gave the loud trumpet call to horse !'

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

In an instant the four hundred stout retainers sprang

upon the backs of their impatient steeds, and followed their masters through the massive arch and over the drawbridge. Lord Cretolius and Everard rode on each side of the Lady Ida, and behind them came the litter of prince Selim, whose eyes were often bent upon the graceful form of the Cretolian maiden, or rested on her lovely features as she carelessly turned her head aside to gaze upon some distant object. As the troop turned into the street of palms, the Lady Ida looked back to take a parting view of their castle, now far behind; and as she did so, her eyes rested on the happy face of Selim, whose loving glance she rewarded with a half bashful smile, and quickly turned her head again with a brighter color on her cheeks.

The denizens of the street of palms were now just opening the blinds of their tenements, and the shopkeepers exposed to view their various commodities, to tempt the eyes and empty the pockets of the passers-by. This was the chief mart of the city, and side by side with the low dram-shop appeared the magnificent saloon, while in close contiguity with the rough building of the dealer in vegetables or fruit, the magnificent casements of the jeweller or broker displayed their treasured heaps of gold and precious stones.

Many curious glances were cast upon the troop ere they reached the eastern gate, and the foot-passenger stopped in his course to look, while the inmates of the bordering mansions ceased their avocations to speculate upon the probable import of the procession, which they saw was prepared for a journey, for the news of what had taken place in the senate-chamber the day previous was not yet spread abroad by the busy tongues of the gossips.

Arrived at the eastern gate, the guards on duty there opened it at the sight of the king's seal on the credentials of Lord Cretolius, respectfully presenting arms as he Cretolians passed out, and took the road leading towards the river Euphrates; the season being favorable, and the sun being so far southward as to have but little power comparatively, they were not much incommoded by the heat. All day long the sturdy steeds bore their burdens, and nothing occurred to alarm the troop, till just towards evening, when one of them rode up to Lord Cretolius, and thus addressed him:

'My lord, there is a cloud of dust to the westward, in the midst of which I can plainly see the gleam of arms. If I mistake not, they are in pursuit of us, whoever they may be, as they seem to be coursing in this direction.'

At this, Everard rode to the rear of the corps, and gazing intently on the distant troop, was enabled to distinguish the red dresses of the Turcoman tribes, who rapidly approached. He spoke to Lord Cretolius, in the hearing of prince Selim, as follows:

'My father, they are the Moslem, and I fear harbor evil designs upon us. However, as near as I can judge, they are few in number and not worthy a second thought, unless they should gather other bands against us.'

'If they wear the red dress of our race,' said Selim, 'ye need not mind them, for few among the emirs but know the son of Ben Istam, and they will bow to my mandates. Thus, instead of being enemies, at my orders they will form part of your escort, and add to your security.'

'Then we shall lose nothing by our kindness to you, I perceive,' said the Lady Ida, playfully.

‘You will not, fair maiden,’ answered Selim, earnestly, ‘for ere harm shall reach you, the blood of Selim shall stain the sands, and his last breath be spent in your defence.’

Everard looked thoughtfully upon the passionate eyes of the prince and the blushing cheek of his sister Ida, but said nothing. Ere long the troop in their rear came closer into view, and as the sinking sun, an hour after, left twilight to reign supreme over the dim expanse of desert, forty stalwart riders, clothed in the garb of the Moslem, and mounted on powerful steeds of jetty blackness, came up beside the Cretolians, and moved in a parallel course, at a respectful distance.

They were led by a warrior bearing upon his limbs the dress and insignia of a Turcoman prince, who, leaving his men, reined his charger in at the side of Lord Cretolius and Everard, who regarded his movements with suspicion, and whispered, in a familiar tone :

‘Did I not tell you I would be with you ere night-fall ? You see I have kept my promise.’

‘D’Arville, is it you !’ exclaimed Lord Cretolius.

‘Well, as I am here, I should never have penetrated your disguise, had I not heard your voice,’ said Everard.

‘I am accustomed to such adventures,’ replied D’Arville, ‘and have learned discretion by experience.’

‘But who are these in your train ? they have the appearance of your foes, the Moslem,’ said Everard.

‘Nay, then, they are not what they appear,’ said D’Arville. ‘Your guide, who introduced me to the Jew Isaac, this morning, at your orders, aided me in procuring the promise of as many Saracen dresses as I

should need. Thereupon I went to the quarters of my gallant knights, and finding eighty of them in their hall, inquired in a loud tone, that all might hear, who of them could speak the Arabic tongue. At least one half answered my question, and having proved the truth of their assertions by addressing a few sentences to each, I led the way to the Jew Isaac, where they were fitted with skull-caps of steel to wear beneath their turbans, and with these scarlet dresses.

‘Leaving the rest of my troop in charge of Sebastian, my lieutenant, with strict orders not to stir from the walls of the city, I called the chosen knights to take their disguises, in a small bundle on their saddles, and bidding adieu to Palmyra, soon left its gates far behind. When out of sight of the city, we dismounted, donned our Turcoman disguises over our armor, and then resuming our course, followed with rapidity the traces of your march in the desert sand, and have thus at last overtaken you.’

‘And so you have fairly started on your adventurous pilgrimage in search of the wife and child of Marontius?’ said the Lady Ida, inquiringly.

‘Yes, fair lady, and with the help of Heaven and St. John, I intend to prosecute my search through every danger, till I have accomplished the objects of my vow,’ replied D’Arville.

‘But ere you can do so,’ said Ida, ‘methinks you will have to pass through many perilous scenes, and dare many fearful encounters and adventures.’

‘I know it,’ said D’Arville, proudly, ‘and in such a life of danger I am at home. Better, far better, is it to strengthen the soul by trial, than to remain in idleness. The projects of our order against the Moslem have

fallen to the ground, and nothing now is left me to satiate the restless longings of my soul, but the glorious deeds and noble actions of knight errantry.'

As he concluded, the voice of Selim fell upon the ear of D'Arville.

'Prince of the scarlet turban, who art thou, and whence comest thou? I pray thee tell me.'

'And who art thou that askest?' replied D'Arville.

'I am Selim, the younger of the princes of Ben Istam, and the brother of Hafed, the Lion of Turkestan.'

'Ha! do I behold the dauntless Selim! Now may I rejoice, for I have seen the hope of the emirs of Laconia and the Euphrates. Mine eyes behold the morning star that beameth above the dark clouds of the Mogul destruction, and heraldeth the glorious dawn of a brighter day which soon will rise over the children of Allah and the prophet,' said D'Arville.

'How admirably the knight imitates the style and manner of the Arabic diction,' whispered Ida to Everard.

'Prince of a strange tribe, tell me who thou art, since I have answered thy question,' said Selim.

'I am Arnil, of the far distant land of the Tigris. Near Mossoul my father's tribe dwell, and their tents are scattered along the river side. Few are the lances of our house, for those who follow in my train are a tenth part of our race. Yet they are as bold as the lion that springs from the thickets of the far east, and determined in battle as the sons of Ben Istam. I have heard of your warlike renown, and I came hither to aid you in reaching that throne you seek.'

'Ha!' exclaimed the prince Selim, 'how knowest thou that? Now by the beard of the prophet, I never

breathed it to mortal man, yet hast thou read my thoughts, as easily as the eastern magi read the heavens.'

'Wilt thou accept my proffered aid, mighty prince?' said D'Arville. 'I have read thy intentions, but I can tell thee that will startle thee still more. Thy brother Hafed seeketh the dominion of Laconia and the east for himself, and when it is his, you will perish, for he intends to rule alone, and hold undivided power.'

'Is it so, indeed! then I must bestir myself, for, by the beard of Mahomet, he shall not wrest from me that which I have determined to have. Mine was the proposal to seize the fallen sceptre of Iconium, to re-instate the empire which the Mogul swept away, and Hafed promised to join me in the project on condition of ruling conjointly with me. But now, ~~since~~ he would deprive me of all power when we shall have gained it, I vow, with the blessing of Allah, that his course of villany shall end, and I, instead of Hafed, shall be the sultan of the restored empire of Asia Minor. Prince of the Tigris, I accept thy gallant steel and proffered assistance, and when Selim shall become the founder and dictator of the Othman power, thou shalt not be forgotten.'

D'Arville simply saying 'So be it,' gave his hand to Selim, in token of the ratification of their compact, and then rode again to the head of his troop, and putting spurs to his horse, galloped with his men towards the river Euphrates, which they reached in another hour, and crossed by means of a bridge spanning its clear stream.

At a distance of a mile from the banks of the river beyond, an eminence rose gently from the surrounding plain, which was quite fertile, and dotted here and

there with small houses, to the number of three or four hundred, whose outward appearance presented a mixture of the English and Saracen styles of building. On the summit of this eminence a vast rock was perched, and founded on its stony area, a dark castle, of gothic architecture, rose into the air. This was the home of Arthur, Baron De Montfort, who was known among the Moslem as 'the good-hearted knight.'

The baron represented himself to be a relation of the famous Simon De Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in England, and when the latter seized upon the weak monarch, Henry III, and his son Edward, Arthur joined the army of his powerful relative. The earl, however, unwisely released the young prince, Edward, who thereupon gathered an army, and met the usurper, Simon, on the bloody field of Everham, put his forces to flight, and slew the earl.

Arthur, deeming it unsafe to remain longer in England, embarked with his treasures for France, and when Louis IX of France led the last crusade against the Saracen in 1248, Arthur, with a thousand devoted followers, joined the expedition, but in the disastrous battles which ensued he lost half his men, and being taken prisoner with the rest, gave up all hope of ever returning to his native land, and consented to become a vassal of the great Mogul, whose armies swept away the Saracen empire and that of Iconium. Fixing his residence here, on the banks of the Euphrates, he had passed forty years in pursuing the avocations of peace, and by his quiet demeanor and kind acts, together with the many arts he imparted to his neighbors, he had gained the esteem of the Moslem, and was permitted to remain unmolested amid the wild scenes of turmoil which surrounded him.

Rapidly the knight, Sir Percy D'Arville, approached the eminence with his troop, and soon after blew a bugle before the gate of the castle. The porter, imagining them to be a troop of Moslem, called his master, but the latter, on hearing the voice of D'Arville, caused the drawbridge to be dropped, whereupon the knights rode across it, gazing carelessly into the chasm which it spanned, and entering the courtyard, dismounted. The knight and the baron, meanwhile, retired to a private apartment, where the former disclosed the state of affairs at Palmyra, spoke of his own mission, and gave the baron a hint to address him in no other way than as the prince Arnil, whenever Selim should be present. Orders were given to prepare for the reception of the coming guests, and the two warriors continued their conversation.

They were at last aroused by the trampling of hoofs upon the drawbridge, and looking from a casement, beheld the retainers of the house of Cretolius filing into the courtyard beneath them. Lord Cretolius, Everard, and Ida, had dismounted, and were entering the hall, followed by the esquires supporting prince Selim. Hastening down into the hall, the baron met and welcomed his guests, and led them into the chamber where a sumptuous repast had been provided by the attendants, and the travellers sat down with a good appetite.

By chance, the Lady Ida and Selim sat side by side, and directly opposite them the knight and Everard; the baron and Lord Cretolius were at some distance, at the other end of the table, engaged in carrying on a private conversation. Selim, seeing that the knight and Everard were intent upon their own affairs, in a like

manner, softly whispered to Ida, in a tone so low that he thought none could overhear :

‘Bright being, I am but too happy to be at thy side. Would that this happiness might be mine forever. Thou art lovelier in my eyes than the dawning of morn, fairer than the rose of Persia. Thou knowest how devotedly I love thee, beautiful daughter of Palmyra, and canst thou not trust thy welfare in the keeping of thy loved Selim ? O, if thou wilt, thou shalt be more powerful than the queen of Byzantium, and if thou wishest, thy throne shall be firmly established in the great city of Constantine. For thee, lovely houri, bright star of paradise, shall Selim’s glittering blade cleave a path to power, for thee shall his right arm wield the trenchant steel, and at thy feet he will lay the wealth of principalities, the coronets of rulers.’

Deeper and deeper mantled the blush over the cheek of the Lady Ida, faster beat her throbbing heart, and brighter was the downcast eye. Gathering her fortitude, she spoke thus, in a soft voice, which fell on Selim’s senses like fairy music :

‘Selim, this must not be. I told you the feelings of my heart, the determination of my mind, a night or two ago, and said that you might see me when three months had passed away. But if you say more now, I will never permit you to look on me again. I must retire a moment to recover from my confusion, for should my brother know what you have said to me—he would—my father would—I mean I could not be in your presence another instant.’

Arising from the table, she left the room, unperceived by her father or Baron Arthur ; and Selim, lest his eyes should betray his feelings, dropped his gaze upon

his plate, not daring to look at the young men opposite, and appeared to be engaged in discussing the viands before him, though his appetite was gone.

But the incident had not escaped the watchful eyes of D'Arville, who, when the prince first spoke to Ida, had caught a few of the impassioned sentences uttered by Selim, and directed Everard's attention to them.

'Everard, notice the impassioned manner in which yon prince speaks to your sister. Nay, do not let your tongue loose now, but veil the angry glance of your eyes a moment, and let us witness the denouement.'

'In faith, she seemeth well pleased,' replied Everard, compressing his lips, 'and look at the telltale blood flushing her face, and see her veiled lips. Are not the emotions visible in her face signs of love?'

'So I should say,' replied D'Arville, 'and it is no more than I suspected, yesterday even, when we brought the news of Selim's disappearance to her ears. Her pallid cheeks and anxious eye told me a tale there.'

'See, she speaks,' said Everard, 'and rather severely I should judge, but she does not raise her eyes.'

'By my halidom, Everard, he loves her!' said Arville, as Ida left the room; 'what a change came over his face as she spoke, and now see what despairing sadness sits on his handsome features.'

'This must go no farther,' said Everard.

'Nay, keep still, and we will talk of that hereafter, when we seek our room, and by that means we will be better able to take such measures as you may decide upon. Here she comes back as if nothing had happened, and see, his face brightens up again with happiness.'

As the knight spoke the Lady Ida entered with averted eyes, and reseated herself. D'Arville, to prevent any unpleasant remarks from Everard, asked Selim :

‘ Brave prince of Ben Istam, how hast thou received the injuries which render thee unable to walk ?’

‘ Noble Arnil,’ answered the prince, ‘ it is a strange tale, and hath much in it of fearful import, but thou shalt hear it, and judge for thyself.’

The prince Selim commenced the tale of his adventure the night but one previous, and portrayed forcibly its various details, till he arrived at the point of his narrative where he described his entrance to the hall.

‘ I drew the door open, and crossed the threshold, but its hinges seemed to turn of themselves, and sprang it to behind me with a loud noise. Sounds of an uncertain nature seeming to issue from above, I sought some means by which to ascend, and at last, after a patient search, came upon a broad stairway, up which I trod, and ascended several flights. At last I reached a heavy panelled entrance, through which I passed, and forced myself within a spacious chamber, where were scattered some broken scimitars and shields, which I remarked bore the arms of the tribe of Ben Istam. This astonishing discovery led me to make some exclamations of wonder, which were interrupted by a demon laugh that sent the blood in chilling streams, and then I felt myself seized from behind, and conveyed forcibly out of the room, and down the stairs, by something seeming to have superhuman power. A voice of furious sound spoke to me :

“ Fool, hast thou come to claim the arms of the spoiler ? Know that my right hand struck to the earth

those who wielded them, when my adored Azilla was torn from my arms by the villains of the desert? Know that those scimitars you gazed on but now in yon chamber, were powerless before the strength of Marontius? And now, wretch, thou shalt follow their possessors to the depths of despair!"

'Borne high aloft, I could not see the one who carried me into the hall. The side of a fire-place seemed to open, and I was conveyed down stone steps into a damp and gloomy place, and was thrown into a dungeon, and fastened so cruelly that I would have died of torture, had not yon noble youth and gallant knight rescued me, after I had lain there in agony a whole day.'

The features of D'Arville lit up with pleasure as he murmured to himself: 'Then the spoilers of Marontius bore the arms of Ben Istam's tribe. Now is my vow in a fair way of being accomplished, and by following the steps of this noble Selim in the guise of a Moslem prince, I shall yet restore the fair Azilla and her daughter to their beautiful home.'

CHAPTER XI.

Lady Ida at the castle of De Montfort. Continuation of the journey of Lord Cretolius. Attack of the mountaineers. They recognize Selim, and swear allegiance to him. Sudden appearance of three riders with news of the villany of king Iscora. Return of Everard to Palmyra. Cretolius and prince Selim continue their journey. Surprising incident.

AT daybreak, the gallant D'Arville was awakened by the golden beams of the rising sun, which came in through the casement of the turret-chamber where he had slept, and shone brightly on his armor hanging on the opposite wall. He was wont to be up before the sun, but had lain awake so long the previous night, after retiring, thinking upon the words of prince Selim, in relation to the arms the latter had seen in the haunted palace, that he slept later than usual.

He had concluded, in his mind, that the best mode of procedure for the purpose of accomplishing his vow, was to win the confidence and esteem of prince Selim, in the guise of a Saracen emir, and then to throw aside his assumed dress, make a confidant of

BREAKFAST-ROOM AT THE BARON DE MONTFORT'S.



Entrance of the party to partake of the morning meal.—See page 129.

lim, and entreat his powerful aid for the discovery of the captive Azilla and her daughter.

Rising, D'Arville donned his armor, placed over it the magnificent Saracen disguise he had assumed, and descended to the breakfast-room below, where the rest were already assembled. During the discussion, at the table, it was decided that the Lady Ida should stay at the castle of De Montfort a week or two, with forty of the Cretolian retainers, till her father and brother could return from their embassy to Iconium.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

This being decided, the trumpet of Everard called the knight to the saddle, and having bidden adieu to the Baron and his family, he set forth, followed by Lord Cretolius and Everard with their retainers, and the prince Selim. He rode out the gate, followed by D'Arville and his disarmed knights escorting the litter of the prince Selim. It was a delicious morning. The cool autumnal breeze fanned the brows of all, and imparted its exhilarating influence to every bosom. Their course lay along the smooth Euphrates, whose rippling waters sparkled clear as crystal in the sun's bright beams, and the murmuring stream sent to their delighted ears the sweet melody of nature's music. Around them, on the verdant bank, along which they travelled, bloomed flowers of every hue, while a smiling landscape spread itself beneath the rays of the rising luminary, far to the east. But across the river, the desert of Syria stretched away from the western bank, a boundless expanse of sparkling sand.

Ere night-fall, they lost sight of the desert, and for five days made their way amid the varied scenery of

the Euphrates. On the sixth morning, however, prince Selim thought it would be best to leave the direct route, and take one more to the westward, which would be safer and more secluded; the course they had been pursuing, being that travelled by the wild tribes of the mountains in their incursions to the southward.

The seventh day, in passing a defile, the train of Cretolians was suddenly attacked on all sides by the fierce mountaineers, and in the desperate fight which ensued, at least one half of the retainers were killed and wounded. Everard's voice encouraged his followers throughout, his gallant arm working wondrous destruction amid the foe. Even the aged Lord Cretolius wielded the keen scimitar which for twelve years had rested in polished idleness in its sheath, and fought in the van, till a stroke from some missile weapon stunned him, and he fell senseless in the arms of his household.

Selim, D'Arville, and the disguised knights were at least a mile behind when the fray commenced, but rode rapidly up to the scene, on perceiving the flashing of arms among the rocks far ahead, and hearing the sound of conflict. The prince had recovered from his bruises so far as to be able to mount his white steed again, and he now urged D'Arville's band toward the scene of turmoil, where they arrived in time to save the remnant of the Cretolians from destruction.

When the mountaineers saw the red dresses of D'Arville's band intervene between them and their prey, they fell back, imagining they were part of the sultan's guard. Five of their chieftains advanced, without attendants, and seeing that one of the two princes who appeared to be in command of the scarlet

iders was the youthful Selim, they greeted him with low obeisances. Some of their followers, knowing the prince, spoke his name to others, and the mountain rocks soon sent back the echoes of a thousand wild voices, as they shouted :

‘Hail to the dauntless son of Ben Istam! hail to the hope of the Turcoman tribes! May he reign forever.’

‘You hear,’ whispered D’Arville, ‘they hail you as a monarch, and to you the people of these savage regions look, as to one whom they have chosen to re-instate the fallen empire of the Turcoman tribes, and sway the mighty sceptre of a sultan.’

The eyes of Selim were lit with pleasure, and ambitious thoughts swelled within his bosom at D’Arville’s words, though he replied briefly, ‘the time has not yet come,’ and then addressing himself to the chiefs, who awaited his mandates in respectful silence :

‘Emirs of the mountain tribes, these are not foes whom you have slain, for they come not with warlike intent, but in peace, as the messengers of the beautiful city, Palmyra. They have come to seek peace from the emirs of Laconia and the north; wherefore, then, have you done this?’

‘Gallant prince,’ replied the oldest chief, ‘had we known this, we would have restrained our warriors from the prey; but the lion of your tribe, Hafed, hath sent messengers throughout all our borders, calling on us to destroy the inhabitants of the beautiful city wherever we found them. He said that the rulers of Palmyra had slain you secretly, and he is gathering the hosts of the north, with the war-cry of “vengeance and conquest.”’

‘Is it so? then, emirs, listen. The artful Hafed knew that I had disappeared, and while the sons of Palmyra searched for me, he sat still. Ere ten hours had passed, he departed from the city, and left me to my fate. Emirs, he hateth me, and would gladly have me removed from his path to power; choose thou between us.’

‘By the beard of the prophet, the cruel Lion of Turkestan, the oppressive Hafed, shall never tread the mountain tribes beneath his feet,’ replied the chief. ‘We will have none but the dauntless Selim to sway the sceptre over us. May he reign a thousand years, and his children be mighty in the earth.’

‘Emir, I thank you,’ replied Selim. ‘Hafed would lead you to the conquest of Palmyra, but Selim shall show you the path to the spoil of Byzantium, and the dominion of Asia Minor, and when Selim is Othman, he will not forget you.’

‘Hail to the dauntless Selim!’ rang again from a thousand tongues.

‘Prince of Ben Istam,’ said another chief, ‘we will shout your name from every mountain summit, we will send it along every valley, we will speak it in the tents of every tribe, and when thou shalt call us to thy coronation, when thou shalt bid us follow thee to conquest, or seek our aid to place thee on the throne we would see thee fill, we will gather around thy banner a hundred chieftains of our race, and swell thy host with twenty thousand bold mountaineers. Allah preserve thee, hope of a thousand tribes, and continue thy life to victory and power.’

The emirs now led the way to a small village beyond the mountain, whither the wounded Cretolians

were carried and their wants supplied. Lord Cretolius recovered soon from his insensibility, and was able to speak, but it was deemed prudent for him to be kept quiet a day or two, that he might not experience any ill effects from the blow he had received, his age rendering the physician fearful on the subject. The whole train were therefore well pleased to accept the hospitalities of the mountaineers, which Everard remarked were more welcome than their hostilities.

Many of the neighboring chiefs came to pay their respects to the prince Selim, and assure him of their support, and the next day was passed in friendly trials of skill between the disguised knights and the chiefs, in which the latter were most successful in the use of missiles, while the former proved themselves expert in the use of the sabre, and not one was found to dare a second trial of arms with prince Arnil, as D'Arville called himself. The mountaineers were curious to know wherefore the warriors of prince Arnil wore such weapons; D'Arville told them it was in consequence of a religious vow, made by the tribe of his father, not to touch the scimitar till they should see the revival of their faded power.

The second day after the fray, the aged Lord Cretolius being considered out of danger, the train again resumed their course towards the tents of Ben Istam, and the knight spent the hours of travel in discussing with Selim the ambitious projects of the latter, and exciting him to gather around him at once his friends, and declare himself the sultan of Iconium. For thirty years no monarch had sat on the vacant throne of Laconia, since the destroying course of the Mogul conqueror had embraced their dominions in his own,

and when the usurper died, the emirs of the different provinces regained a separate independence. Still, however, the temporary chief of their council was known as the sultan of Iconium, but it was an empty title.

Now, however, through the endeavors of the two princes of Ben Istam, the emirs began to consider favorably the project of re-uniting their powers, and forming again a mighty empire. The only ones on whom they could agree as being the most suitable to fill the vacant throne, were Hafed and Selim, in whose favor they were nearly equally divided, though Selim enjoyed the greatest popularity among the youthful princes of the different tribes, while Hafed's cruel and overbearing disposition was rapidly gaining for him bitter enemies, and his insolent assumption of authority bid fair to change friends to foes.

Towards evening, a trooper rode up to the group of leaders, from the rear of the escort of Cretolians, and thus addressed Lord Cretolius:

'May it please you, my lord, three riders on swift steeds follow our course, as if to overtake us, and from their motions I should judge they were beckoning us to halt for them.'

Everard rode aside to a small eminence, and after gazing a moment along the path they had come, gave orders to his retainers to halt. The other leaders were soon at Everard's side, and as D'Arville looked at the comers he said:

'They are two emirs of the mountain tribes we left this morn, and the other, I should judge from his garb, is a follower of Ben Istam. Now, may Allah grant we have another adventure on hand, for my warriors of the Tigris are impatient for the fray.'

A few minutes sufficed to bring the three riders up to the band of nobles, and while the two emirs paid their respects to the prince Selim, the third stranger addressed himself to Lord Cretolius. The latter was somewhat surprised at hearing one in the Turcoman dress speak in the tongue of Palmyra, and in answer to the stranger's request, the noble and Everard retired a short distance from the rest to hear his message.

'My Lord Cretolius, I have had a dangerous ride among the mountains, and have taken this longer course in pursuit of you for the sake of security, and happy will my Lord Morden be when I shall tell him on my return that I have succeeded in accomplishing my mission. He sends you this note, by my hands. You seem surprised, but I am no Saracen, and merely a faithful follower of the noble Morden.'

Lord Cretolius took the letter, and having read it, handed it to Everard, with a mournfully thoughtful expression in his face. As Everard perused it, however, his countenance became flushed with indignation, and he cried:

'The base ingrate! and is it thus he repays us for our services? Was it for this he sent us on this dangerous mission? Would that I could be in Palmyra a few short hours, and I would teach him a bitter lesson, I would give him cause to repent his villainy. Here, D'Arville, read, read, and then say what should befall the ungrateful wretch who dares to contemplate such an insult to our ancient house.'

'My name is not D'Arville,' said the knight, with a cautioning look, 'but Arnil, prince of the tribe of the Tigris, whose warriors reside on the green banks of the swift flowing Tigris.'

‘The prince and the emirs notice you not,’ said Lord Cretolius, ‘therefore come further this way, and read a tale of the basest villany ever thought of by man.’

D’Arville did so, and as he concluded, he exclaimed:

‘You ask me what should befall him? He should be hurled headlong from his throne, and trampled in the dust, and by my halidom, were we there together, we would soon raise such a tempest of wrath about his ears, that he would feel the very foundations of his power tremble beneath him, and hear the dread rumbling of the volcano whose explosion should bury him in the ashes of oblivion. But what intend you to do?’

‘We will return,’ cried Everard; ‘we will return, and marshalling our gallant legion, publish through the streets of Palmyra, in every palace-hall, his baseness, and accepting the proffered aid of the powerful Lord Morden, call around our standard all who would see the cause of virtue and justice triumphant, and then summon the spoiler to disgorge his prey. If he refuses, or if one hair of her head be injured, let him beware! for with power in our hands, a scene of fearful strife will ensue, and the terrible contest be continued either till he is torn from his throne, or the last retainer of our lordly house shall have perished.’

‘Were it **not** for my vow,’ cried D’Arville, ‘I would return with you, and with my gallant knights join your array. But as it is, my vow of knight-errantry binds me to one object, and I may not do as I would wish. Heaven and St. John speed you, and aid you in your daring enterprise. Shall you leave us now?’

‘Instantly,’ said Everard, ‘think you not so, my father?’

‘I do,’ replied Lord Cretolius. ‘Take with you all of our troop but fifty, and make a rapid progress on your mission. Spare not the spur, rest not, neither turn aside, and when thou hast rescued the flower of our house from her perilous position, and punished the aggressor, then I will welcome you as worthy of my name. Falter in this, and I will disown you.’

‘So be it, my father,’ said Everard. ‘And now for my preparations. Ere yon sun shall set I must reach the mountain pass, and ere four days shall have passed, the hoofs of my steed shall echo beneath the gateway of Palmyra.’

The retainers of Cretolius were now ordered to disencumber themselves of every unnecessary article, and all but fifty directed to retrace their footsteps, and ride as rapidly as possible homewards. Everard told the lieutenants that he would soon follow and overtake them, and the astonished troop, without a question, rode swiftly away across the plain.

The prince Selim, in surprise, inquired the reason of this unexpected movement, and was told that strange news, brought by the messenger who came with the two emirs, rendered it necessary for Everard instantly to return to Palmyra.

‘Farewell, my noble preserver,’ said Selim, ‘and may the blessings of Allah rest forever on the head of him who rescued me from the gloomy dungeon of the haunted castle. If ever you meet the dark-mailed knight, D’Arville, tell him that Selim holds him also in grateful remembrance. Say to the Lady Ida, that—that—I cherish her memory. Adieu.’

Everard embraced his father, and then turning to the

knight, grasped his hand, with a parting word, while D'Arville, handing him a ring, whispered :

'Take this token, and when you reach Palmyra, seek my lieutenant Sebastian, give him this, and tell him I desire him to assist you in rescuing your fair sister. You may confide in him as a friend, for he is true as steel, and will bring to your aid the forty knights of my troop whom I left in his charge. Adieu.'

'Hold,' said Selim. 'Emirs of the mountain tribes, take a thousand of your followers, and guard this friend of Selim safely to his home, and your services shall be remembered.'

'The prince Selim hath but to command, and we obey,' said one of the emirs. 'Remember, son of Ben Istam, we wait but the signal to gather to your aid. The blessings of Allah rest on you. Farewell.'

With low obeisances the emirs withdrew, and at the side of Everard, were soon urging their rapid way across the fertile plain, in order to overtake the retainers, who were now at a considerable distance on their return. The aged nobleman gazed sorrowfully upon the receding figure of his son, and when a slight elevation interrupted the view, he reined his steed toward the north again, saying, mournfully, as he resumed his course, and the party moved forward :

'Prince of the Tigris, it may be that I have looked for the last time upon the noble Everard, and that ere yon sun shall have six times run his daily course the banner of our lordly race will have been rent, the brave retainers of our house will sleep in death, and our glorious fame and name have perished before the power of the base insulter.'

'And it may be,' said the knight, endeavoring to

aise the drooping spirits of Lord Cretolius, 'and it may be, ere your forebodings will be accomplished, hat the retainers of your house with their allies may ave torn the despot from the seat he has desecrated, your fame may have become more lasting, and the victorious Everard may have placed the banner of your race upon the battlements of the royal palace.'

The evening now began to fall, and the prince directed the course of the party towards a wooded hill at some distance, on the summit of which a single large mansion, built in the Saracen style, stood alone, and seemed to promise accommodations for the three leaders and their followers. On making their way through the wood, and emerging into the little plain on the brow of the hill, they discovered the house was tenantless, and therefore took possession without scruple. Wood was brought in, and huge fires built, as the evening proved a little chilly, and after a few hours of conversation, and a ramble through the house, all retired to a welcome rest.

At dawn all was astir, but as the prince Selim knew he was but a day's march from Iconium, near which his father held dominion, he was in no hurry to depart, and preparations for the morning meal was made leisurely. While this was going on, the knight ascended to one of the upper rooms of the deserted mansion, and looked forth upon the landscape. While thus occupied a servant was sent to call him down, but the man soon returned with a request that the prince Selim should come up instantly, as a favor.

The prince wonderingly ascended the stairs, and on entering the room in which stood the knight, found him gazing earnestly from a window which opened to the

northward. As D'Arville heard the step of the prince, he exclaimed :

‘ In faith, prince Selim, that is no cloud tinted with the rosy flush of morn which I behold in the edge of the horizon. Either my eyes deceive me much, or I see the followers of the prophet ; the scarlet robes of our Moslem race are easily to be seen by daylight.’

Selim looked, and there, far away to the northward, in the edge of the sky, appeared a red streak, which while he gazed, seemed gradually to grow larger.

‘ Now, by the beard of the prophet, it is the sons of Ben Istam, the dauntless warriors of our tribe. Look, as they descend the face of the distant hill, how their dress contrasts with the dark color of the ground. You are right, prince Arnil, they are the followers of the prophet. Doubtless, Hafed leads them to the conquest of Palmyra, but he shall be foiled this time, as there is a crescent in his host, he shall. I have said it, and I will maintain my words, or die.’

‘ Let us descend,’ replied D'Arville, ‘ and meet them in their course. They may take another direction ere they reach us.’

Selim and D'Arville soon went down the staircase to the apartment below, and communicated their discovery to Lord Cretolius. The news spread rapidly from mouth to mouth, till all within the walls of the mansion knew it. The meal being concluded, D'Arville and Lord Cretolius marshalled their respective followers, and with the prince Selim passed the wood and issued into the open plain. For three hours they steadily held their way, but could obtain no view of the approaching Moslem, as a hill intervened.

As they reached the top of the hill and began its

ascent, they heard the music of the Turcoman bands floating in the air, and on gaining the summit, a troop of light cavalry galloped around them at a distance as if to reconnoitre. And now a scene of magnificence met their eyes ; for there, below them, just rising from the plain, to ascend the eminence, marched fifteen thousand warriors of the tribe of Ben Istam in battle array, while on their flanks five thousand of the swift horsemen of their race, with scarlet robes and flashing scimitars, coursed along the plain on their snowy chargers.

D'Arville ranged his disguised knights along each flank of the Cretolian retainers, and as Selim took up his station in front, the knight and Lord Cretolius ordered a halt, and reined in their steeds upon either hand of the prince. There upon the summit waved the long blue plumes of the little band of Cretolians. Upon the plain below moved the twenty thousand sons of Ben Istam in pride and power. It was a fearful moment for all but the prince Selim.

He gazed with glistening eye upon his gallant tribe, and in silence awaited their recognition. In vain his look sought Hafed amid the group of magnificently dressed emirs, who rode amid the foremost band—he was not there.

When the Moslem riders perceived the new-comers upon the hill, they dashed in large numbers along the sod, and wheeled close in their front.

‘The prince Selim!’ ‘The dauntless rider!’ ‘Allah be praised, we see him again.’ ‘Welcome to Ben Istam’s pride.’ ‘He lives, he lives,’

Such were the shouts that rent the air, such were the words that issued from countless lips, and as the joyful import of the cry met the ears of the slower moving

footmen behind, they sent up to the heavens a wild echo of triumphant pleasure that rang out like the voice of a whirlwind. On every side they pressed around the prince, with exclamations of delight, and it was with difficulty that he could preserve the little band of his escort from being crushed to death in the crowd.

After a while order was restored, and the warriors of Ben Istam withdrew to a respectful distance, leaving their chiefs in a group before the prince. After gazing proudly round upon the circling thousands, Selim spoke:

‘Chiefs of my father’s tribe, whither bend you your warlike course?’

‘Dauntless Selim, we move toward the beautiful city of the Syrian plain. Hafed, the Lion of Turkestan, hath called us to arms, to revenge your murder by the Palmyrenes, but Allah be praised, we see you again.’

‘And where is my brother Hafed?’ asked Selim.

‘He leadeth forty thousand of the Seljukide Turks along the route of the pleasant Euphrates, and thirty thousand warriors of the tribes of Turcomania have taken the course beyond the western mountains. Ourselves, with the gallant sons of Ben Istam are to pursue the mountain road. The prince Hafed left three days hence, and ere this, must have come in sight of the desert.’

‘This must not be, chiefs. The Palmyrenes harmed me not, but I lost myself in a ruined castle. They have sent hither this aged man, Lord Cretolius, to seek for peace. This noble prince is Arnil, whose father is an emir by the Tigris.’

‘Hail to the reverend head; welcome to the youthful warrior.’

‘Chiefs of Ben Istam, I ask of you a boon in token of welcome,’ said Selim.

‘Ask, and we will be happy to serve thee,’ replied an emir.

‘Go not forth to the field, but return with your prince to Iconium,’ responded Selim.

Some dissatisfaction seeming to manifest itself among the chiefs at this proposal, the prince, at a hint from D’Arville, thought that now was the time to strike for empire, for if these went with Hafed to the war, he would place those who were partisans of Selim in the front of the battle, that they might perish, and thus weaken the chance of the latter of gaining a sultan’s throne. With a firm voice, and a resolute look, he said :

‘Chiefs of Ben Istam, choose between Selim and Hafed. I will bear his tyranny no more, by the beard of the prophet. Hafed would direct you to the conquest of a single city, of almost impregnable strength; Selim would show you the way to the hearts of the Byzantine empire, and lead you to the conquest of a thousand cities. Choose, and may Allah give you wisdom; Hafed and a city, or Selim and an empire.’

‘Selim and an empire!’ ‘Death to the Greek!’ was the reply from the ambitious emirs, while, ‘Long live Selim Othman, sultan of Turcomania!’ was echoed by the thousands of Ben Istam’s warlike tribe who had thronged around to hear.

‘Back then to Iconium, in the name of Allah!’ cried Selim.

CHAPTER XII.

Plans of King Iscora. Their frustration, and how. Lady Ida at De Montfort's. She visits a ruined monastery; is waylaid, and made prisoner by the robbers.

KING ISCORa was alone. The chamber in which he sat, lit by two lofty windows, from whose arched tops scarlet curtains drooped, was furnished as much for ease and comfort, as for magnificent display. Within this place of secret council none dared to tread, except a favored few; without, faithful guards watched day and night, that no curious eaves-dropper should hear the state secrets discussed by the ministers and statesmen of the realm.

The monarch sat, on a soft cushioned seat, with his arms folded, and his head half resting on the pillowed back, gazing through the window in meditative mood. It was nearly noon, on the same day in the morning of which Lord Cretolius and his companions left with their escort, to seek the emirs of distant Laconia, and the king was now all impatient for the return of his spies—creatures who would have stained their hands

with the blood of the innocent, at his command, or dared the most fearful adventures for a slight reward.

With a smile of exultation, he said, as a thought crossed his mind :

‘ Ha, ha, ha, now I will win the guerdon, now will I prove her threat. How well I managed, by conferring the honor of the embassy to the Moslem on her father and brother, to get them out of the way. Ere they return I shall have revelled in her charms, I shall have stolen the bright jewel of the house of Cretolius. Ere they return, did I say ? As for that matter, I think they can never again see Palmyra, for with their small escort, the warlike bands which have of late filled the mountain fastnesses between here and Iconium, will inevitably cut them off to a man. But they have been so long absent on their travels that they do not know the exact state of affairs in the north, and will be unexpectedly destroyed in some of the dangerous defiles of the mountains. The Lady Ida is here alone, and now I will have a bitter revenge for her biting scorn, and teach her what it is to look with proud disdain upon a monarch’s suit, and threaten him with punishment. But if I mistake not, the footsteps in the corridor sound like Kasid’s heavy tread, and now I hear his voice demanding admittance. Without there, open to the new comer.’

In obedience to this command the door was opened, and a tall and powerfully-formed man, in splendid costume, but with a cap pulled down over his brows, entered. When he had passed the guard, so that the latter could not see his face, he doffed the cap, and as the door was closed, advanced toward the king, and stood before him in respectful silence.

‘How now, Kasid, wherefore lookest thou so gloomy? Has aught gone wrong in this affair of the lady?’

‘My liege, I fear to say, lest my unworthy head should fall.’

‘Speak on, and when thou hast finished, thou shalt know how long thou hast to live,’ replied the king, briefly.

‘As it is, so must it be. I cannot now change past events,’ said the chief Kasid. The Lady Ida went with her father.’

‘Ha! gone!’ echoed the king, who with a dark look, and a firm expression, continued fiercely—‘Say on.’

‘My liege, pardon me, and let not thine anger fall on me. I saw them leave the gate, but sent two of my men to trace their course, and in the garb of the Cretolian retainers they managed to join the band of Lord Cretolius. Two or three others I sent to mingle with the household at the castle, and from them I have learned since, that the servants of Cretolius say that the Lady Ida is to stay at the castle of the Baron De Montfort, beyond the Euphrates, with about forty followers, till her kindred return from Laconia.’

‘Kasid, thou hast saved thy head,’ said the monarch; ‘for since the lady is within a day’s ride of Palmyra, all will yet go well. But ere thou reapest the reward I promised you, you must convey her hither, and secretly; if ’tis done within a week, the sum shall be doubled.’

‘My liege, you are generous, and to serve so good a master I would go any length. Before yon sun shall have six times run his daily course, she shall be in your power. But there is another piece of news I have of strange import. The prince Selim was found

last night by the envoy of St. John and the Baron Everard, having been taken by the maniac and confined in the ruined castle of the ancient Marontian family.'

'My rival come to light again? where is he now?'

'He departed with Lord Cretolius,' replied the chief.

A dark flash crossed the monarch's countenance, while he rose from his seat suddenly, and paced the room backward and forward with quick steps, saying:

'The fates seem to conspire against me, Kasid; this is a bad affair, and I would that the knight of St. John had been in Tophet ere he showed his face here to beard me in my senate-chamber, and disconcert my plans. Had I known what would have come to pass, he should have vanished from the sight of men ere he could have done this. Now the prince Selim will accompany the Cretolians, and guard them by his power from the fate which I hoped awaited them among the mountains. Worse, worse than that; he is now, perhaps, at her side, whispering to her of love. But what care I? I shall have her, or perish. What are your intentions, and how will you get her?'

'I will find means, my liege; and if no other way succeeds, I can soon, with the aid of your gold, gather around me a band of Saracens strong enough to storm the castle of De Montfort, and tear her from her protector,' answered Kasid.

'Rather than lose her, you shall have all the gold my treasury contains. Away, now, and use secrecy and despatch.'

'I will, my liege. You shall hear from me soon. Adieu.'

So saying, the robber-chief, for such he was, withdrew, and after throwing over his shoulders a capacious cloak of coarse make, which entirely concealed his rich dress, took his way through the streets to a gloomy-looking and half-ruinous mansion in what was called the ruined quarter, and disappeared through the door. Within the walls of this mansion dwelt seventy desperate men, many of them the dregs of the last crusade, others, outlawed Saracens. The chief, Kasid, was of the latter class, and in youth had been an emir of the Tigris; but his fearful crimes and cruel nature rendering him odious to his people, he was compelled to fly to avoid their anger, and chose the robber's course as a means of revenging himself. He raised this band of desperadoes, and at times made fearful and bloody incursions into the land he once oppressed, slaughtering without mercy all of his own kindred and tribe who fell in his way. He had now come to Palmyra secretly, at a message from the monarch, ready for any work of evil with which he might be commissioned, and had been assigned this mansion just mentioned, as a hiding-place for himself and his troop.

But he was not so secure as he imagined; for one of the Palmyrene lords had witnessed the arrival of the ferocious-looking band, wrapped in their coarse cloaks, and being suspicious of their purposes, kept his thoughts to himself, but sent a faithful servant to trace them. This servant, who was a shrewd fellow, found means to ingratiate himself into the favor of two or three of the robbers, and was introduced to the troop as a new recruit, being instantly admitted to a share in the revels which were now going on in the mansion.

When the chief entered, the robbers were gathered

around three tables in the largest room of the house, drinking and carousing, and among them the shrewd servant was already quite a favorite, though he had been in their company but an hour or two. With careful watchfulness he abstained from drinking too much, while from his quondam companions he received remarks on the apparent strength of his head to resist the effects of the great quantity of liquor he seemed to have swallowed. This they considered as an excellent quality, and hailed him as a worthy comrade.

The expedients to which he resorted to keep up this appearance, were ingenious in the extreme, such as pouring a goblet half full of water, and letting it stand till he had an opportunity to fill it up with the darker and weaker wine, so that it appeared to be the light colored wine of Syria, after mixture with water. The Syrian wine was very strong, and with his cup raised he would challenge the others to drink. Much of it he poured in his bosom, and spilt some on the floor, so that the two vases of wine in front of him had disappeared before those around had half finished theirs. At this stage he feigned intoxication, and dropped over upon the floor, apparently senseless.

While he thus lay, listening to the conversation of the robbers, and treasuring its import in his mind, the chieftain Kasid entered, and after looking around, enjoined silence :

‘Is the new comer here ? if he is, let him leave the room, for till his fidelity has been perfectly proved he may not hear our secrets. Where is he ? I see him not.’

‘He is here, upon the floor,’ said a robber. ‘You need not fear that he will reveal any secrets, for he is

too drunken to hear them. He hath finished two vases of wine, and lays like a stone.'

On hearing this, the chief thought no more of him, but proceeded to unfold to his men the result of his conversation with the king, and gave them the story of his plot against the Lady Ida, and the manner in which it was to be carried out, stating that they were to start on their mission that very night. After promising each a liberal reward in case of success, Kasid gave orders that no one should leave the house during the day, and then left the apartment.

For two hours longer the servant lay on the floor, with untiring patience, till nearly all the robbers had ended their carouse in insensibility, revolving in his mind the best mode of escape. A dozen of the band were still occupied with their wine at the other end of the table, and the man, after gazing at them for a while, rose softly on his hands and knees, and crept carefully through the open door, which was close behind him, into the entry. Looking down the stairs which led to the front entrance, he saw four of the band on guard in the vestibule, and therefore made his way into the upper story of the mansion. Here he looked forth from the windows, but could find no way to escape. Going down to the hall again, he resumed his position, determined to wait till the rest of the robbers should have followed the example of their comrades. One after the other they fell back in their seats, into a sound sleep, and soon nothing broke the stillness which reigned in this long deserted mansion, save the heavy breathing of the sleeping villains, and the indistinct voices of the sentries below.

Again rising, the valet gently closed and fastened the

door, that the sentries might not come up and surprise him in the midst of his operations. Going to the casement he opened it, and looked out, but to his disappointment he saw, seated on a broken pillar which lay on the ground, two of the robbers engaged in conversation. Knowing he had no time to spare, he reconnoitered the room carefully, hoping that some new mode of escape might cross his mind, but none appearing, he approached the broad fire-place and peered up the broad chimney. Seeing that there was a spike some distance up, almost within reach of his hand, large enough to afford him a firm footing, could he once mount upon it, he looked further, and to his joy discovered others above it, when his eye had become a little accustomed to the darkness.

He now returned to the door, unfastened it, laid his cap on the sill of the casement, and entering the fire-place once more, sprang up, caught hold of the spike, and by means of his prodigious strength drew himself up, till he could reach the next a foot above. In this way, he soon obtained a foothold, and by means of the spikes, which he found were placed at regular intervals, ascended about twenty feet till he reached a niche a yard square, set in the side of the chimney, where he considered himself safe.

Here he remained in silence, listening anxiously to hear what might pass below. No sound came up the dark aperture, however, till by the dimness of the place he knew that twilight prevailed. Then he heard the voices of the robbers recovering from their drunken sleep, and as the minutes passed, the clatter of cups and platters told him that supper was on hand. The entrance of the chieftain, and his orders to depart, were

•

followed by an inquiry for himself, and loud exclamations of surprise at the discovery of his absence.

He now became fearful they would discover his hiding-place, but was rejoiced to find that they at last concluded he had escaped through the open casement, as his cap lay on the sill. When another hour was spent, he heard the trampling of their feet down the stairs, and some time having elapsed after the sound of their voices died away, he descended and found they had gone.

It was now long after dusk, and the valet, leaving the house, made the best of his way towards the palace of his master, Lord Sicinius, in whose presence he found himself ere an hour had elapsed, and related his adventures circumstantially, and the substance of all he had heard or gathered from the conversation of the robbers. Lord Sicinius heard his tale with astonishment and indignation, and ordering his horse, rode rapidly to the palace of Lord Morden, whom he found at home, and to whom he communicated the story of his valet.

Lord Morden, who entertained a warm friendship for Ida, determined to save her at all events, and as Lord Sicinius had a high regard for Lord Cretolius, having been comrades in the Saracen wars in youth, and fought side by side in many a stern conflict; he offered his assistance to Lord Morden, and that of his three sons, barons of the realm. The two nobles, after a long consultation, concluded to send a letter to the absent ambassador, by a swift messenger, informing him of what they had heard, and the valet was chosen as being the most trustworthy bearer they could find.

He was sent for, and enthusiastically acceded to the proposition made him by the nobles, more through a

spirit of gallantry, than because of the promised reward. Lord Morden wrote the billet himself, not wishing to trust the secret to his secretary ; and it having been sealed, the valet secured it in a thin case in his sandal, after which, he proceeded to make his preparations for departure.

A Turcoman disguise was procured, and mounted on a swift steed the valet took his way, with early dawn, from the city gate, and proceeded along the mountain road northward.

* * * * *

When Lord Cretolius and his troop left the castle of De Montfort, the Lady Ida, after bidding her kindred adieu, and waving her hand to the warm-hearted Selim, ascended to the highest turret of the castle, and watched their course for two long hours, till the band of retainers dwindled to a mere speck in the distance, and the scarlet dresses of D'Arville's troop were no longer to be seen. From her elevated position, she could gaze over a vast extent of territory, and after looking upon the houses which dotted the plain below, her eyes followed the windings of the Euphrates, which lay like a silver serpent on the landscape ; and in the dim distance, thirty miles away, she saw a hill rising from its banks, on whose summit appeared a dark spot, the nature of which she was unable to conjecture.

Feeling somewhat oppressed at the absence of her father and brother, and knowing that theirs was a dangerous mission, she did not feel sufficiently composed to appear at the table of De Montfort, and for three or four days confined herself entirely to the tower allotted to her use. On the evening of the fourth day, however, her sadness had somewhat passed off, and she

joined the aged baron Arthur in his hall, and spent a few hours with him.

In the course of conversation, among other things, the hill and its dark summit came to mind, and in answer to a question of her own, the baron told her the dark spot she noticed was a ruined monastery, which had fallen before the fury of the Saracens a century or more before, and stood on the summit of the hill. Ida had heard of monasteries, and some strange stories of this particular ruin occurring to her mind, she told the baron she thought she would like to visit it, and after a further conversation, it was decided she should start after the first meal next morning, with her retainers, while a strong party of the baron's troopers should accompany her.

The night passed away, and at dawn the Lady Ida arose, and gave her lieutenant the necessary orders. De Montfort sent out messengers and gave notice to about eighty of his followers to gather at the castle within three hours, and then sat down with the Lady Ida to the table. When the meal was finished, the lady was so impatient to be in the saddle, that she could not wait, and as the baron said he would send his men in her course as soon as they arrived, she fearlessly trotted out of the gate with her troop, and took a northward direction. Two of the party, however, had mysteriously disappeared, and though the castle was searched they were not found, though a retainer who had looked from a turret, imagined that he saw two horsemen trotting along the train a great distance to the north.

The Lady Ida made rapid progress, and at noon halted her escort on the banks of the Euphrates, with-

in five miles of the ruined monastery. The provisions carried by her retainers were brought out, and the Lady Ida and her lieutenant seated themselves beneath a palm-tree, while the rest retired to an adjacent grove, and made a hearty meal. After it was concluded they resumed their course, and an hour or two more found them near the monastery.

As they arrived near the summit of the hill on which it stood, voices were heard above, and a soldier who was sent up to reconnoitre, returned with the intelligence that a party of about twenty men in the Palmyrene dress, apparently honest citizens, were taking dinner within. This was not very alarming, and the Lady Ida trotted up the avenue, and with her retainers entered through one of the apertures in the side of the ruin, within one of the cloisters of which appeared the party whose voices they had previously heard.

Seated upon fallen blocks of stone, with others for tables, were a score of substantial looking gentlemen, who looked up as if in surprise at seeing the newcomers.

‘It is the noble Lady Ida, daughter of Lord Cretolius.’

This announcement was hailed with a cheer, and all arose to their feet, while the one who had spoken, dressed in a magnificent costly attire, advanced to the lady with a cup of wine, which he offered her, saying:

‘Will not the Lady Ida take this draught to refresh her after her ride? The fairest damsel in Palmyra is not often seen here, and when she graces the desert with her bright presence, or blooms amid the ruin, she should be as welcome as a rose in winter.’

‘I will but touch it with my lips in answer to your

gallant speech, brave sir,' said she, and after tasting, returned it to him. The cavalier gayly drank the contents, and in answer to a question which the Lady Ida then put to him, replied :

'We are citizens of Palmyra, and started yestern morn to pass two or three days as pleasantly as possible in visiting these ruins, but we little expected such noble company, or to see the belle of the Palmyrene court, the beauteous Lady Ida, in this distant spot.'

'Cease your compliments, I pray you, sir,' responded Ida. 'Came you hither without attendants?'

'Nay,' replied the cavalier; 'our guard of thirty, and twenty servants, wait in a grove just yonder, without the northern wing of the ruin, and there our horses are tethered. Do you intend to alight?'

'I shall, and rest myself a few moments, ere I view the decaying structure, for that was the purpose which brought me hither,' said Ida, as she sprang from her horse.

Her troop followed her example, and having rested herself awhile, she took the arm of her lieutenant, a noble youth, and with the cavalier entered the few apartments which still remained perfect on the ground floor, and listened in pleasure to his description of the various parts of the building, and the uses to which they were applied, at the same time maintaining a sort of respectful coldness towards him, which was natural to be expected by him, as he was a perfect stranger.

As they approached the southern end of the building, a view of the plain appeared through a window, and a mile or more distant, a party of about a hundred horsemen were seen. The moment his eye rested on them the cavalier exclaimed :

‘ Ha, who are those coming hither ?’

‘ They are merely a part of my escort, and if they were not, our united guards would be a match for them,’ replied Ida.

The cavalier turned quickly, and seeing that the retainers of Lady Ida were mingled with the gentlemen of his party, blew a blast on his trumpet, and then suddenly drawing his sword, plunged it through the lieutenant’s body. At the same instant, the pseudo-citizens drew each a knife from his bosom, and struck it into the bosoms of those next to them, and twenty of Lady Ida’s retainers fell to the earth, with the purple stream of their lives issuing from their agonized hearts. The other retainers drew their swords, but ere they had struck down half-a-dozen of the assassins, fifty more of the robber band poured in through the northern door, with naked weapons, and speedily ended the contest. Three only of the Cretolians made their escape, by throwing away their arms, and rushing swiftly through a side window and down the hill.

The cavalier, Kasid, for it was the robber chief, gave hurried orders to mount, and placing the fainting form of the Lady Ida before him, on the back of his powerful steed, led his troop rapidly down the slope of the hill, and directed his course northward, fearing if he rode towards Palmyra, the troop of De Montfort would intercept him.

The three fugitive Cretolians, noticing the approaching body of horse, made the best of their way toward them, fearing the robbers would pursue them, and straining every nerve to escape. At last they neared their coming friends, who soon gathered around with exclamations and inquiries ; but the Cretolians were so

much exhausted, that for a minute or more they were unable to speak. Ere long, however, one of them managed to murmur, in a faint voice :

‘The Lady Ida—they have killed her—the villains in the monastery.’

‘Killed her ! how many were there ? where are your own troopers ?’ said the commander of the Montforts.

‘There were fifty or sixty, and they have killed our men.’

‘Follow us at your leisure. Forward, my merry men, forward, for the sake of the Lady Ida, and let us give the assassins their due reward.’

Onward rushed the dark body of horsemen, the warriors of Old England, as they pressed their steeds across the plain, and up the hill so swiftly, that the bits of their bridles were covered with the white foam, and the horses’ flanks covered with a dew which rolled off their streaming hides like rain. They gained the summit, and the fearful scene which met their gaze on entering, held them silent for a moment in horror, but this emotion gave place to the most terrible anger.

‘What wretches have done this ? what demon hands have been at work here ? Answer, man, or I will finish thy vile course to a certainty,’ said the commander to one of the robbers who lay bleeding on the ground—one of the few the Cretolians had struck to the earth after the first surprise.

‘Fool,’ said the dying wretch, who was a mongrel Saracen, ‘dost thou think I care for death. No. Your threatened blow would but rid me of my pain. Would you know who hired us—the licentious king who sought to ruin his fair subject. I hate him with heart and soul, or you would not know that much. Would

'ou seek those who have thus performed his behests ? They have fled to the northward, and with them they bear the Lady Ida, and ere your heavy armed soldiers can overtake them, they must fly on the wings of the wind. O, Mahomet, Eblis, my heart, my heart—kill me, I pray thee ; this pain is—'

The commander's eye saw the wretch's last gasp, his fearful struggle, and then spurring his horse across the court, plunged down the northern slope of the hill at the head of his followers, in pursuit of Kasid and his robber band, who were now two miles away.

For six long hours the hot chase was kept up, for six long hours the noble steeds of the Britons bore them on, but the swifter steeds of the robbers, and their lighter burthens, rapidly increased the distance between the parties, and when at last the sun set in splendor in the west, the riders of De Montfort could scarcely discern the distant fugitives.

Twilight gradually settled upon the plain, and still the iron-hearted pursuers kept on till the darkness of night wrapped all things in its gloom, and the bright stars shone merrily overhead. Then they ceased their course, and not till then did they rein up their weary chargers, and ascended the side of a neighboring hill which loomed dimly in the atmosphere close in front. The noble animals which had borne them sixty miles that day were cared for, and then the tired troopers took their rest within a sheltering grove, and slept calmly through the dim watches of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

Affairs in Palmyra. Entry of a troop, in disguise. Sudden appearance of Everard before the king, and his demand. The result. Desperate battle at the palace, between the Palmyrene nobles and the troops of king Iscora.

ELEVEN days had elapsed after the departure of Lord Cretolius and his party from Palmyra, and during that time, the yeomen of the city occupied themselves in preparing to meet the storm of war which the Lion of Turkestan had threatened to bring upon them. The armorers and blacksmiths were working night and day, the former in constructing and repairing coats of mail, helmets and bucklers; the latter in making ready tremendous engines of defence to place along the walls of the city. The cutlers were reaping a golden harvest, and the workers of plumes and doublets filled their coffers with silver.

Experienced engineers with large parties of laborers were employed in strengthening various parts of the city walls; in the squares of the city subalterns were busily drilling the retainers of their lords, and barons

1

2

3

4

5

6
A
en
on

ENTRY OF A TROOP OF CRETOLIANS INTO PALMYRA.



Return of Everard in disguise to Palmyra, in quest of the Lady Ida. — See page 163.

marshalled their troops hither and thither, while through the strongly-guarded gates, wagons constantly entered, laden with the harvest from the surrounding fields, or traced their way thither with grain and fruits from the neighboring mountains.

In the midst of these warlike preparations, a body of Cretolius's retainers, one hundred and fifty strong, passed in at the northern gate, apparently under the command of two lieutenants and a centurion, who represented themselves as a part of Lord Cretolius's escort, sent back as unnecessary. Beside the centurion rode a youth of middle height, whose dark skin and straight black hair, gave him the appearance of a native of distant India. He spoke not at the gate, but pulled his cap down over his brows, and kept close to the officer, looking neither to the right nor left.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

Having traversed the street of palms to that of palaces, they turned aside, and reaching the castle of Cretolius, entered and dismounted in the courtyard. The castle guard gathered around with eager questions, to which the new-comers answered not a word, but followed their leaders in silence into the great hall, fastening the doors behind them. Wonder and surprise were predominant in the bosoms of those without, and fearing something was wrong, the seneschal soon gathered three or four hundred men, determined to arrest the party when they should come out, and placed his band in the entry close to the door.

The bolt was sprung within a few minutes after, and as the door slightly opened, and a face looked through

the aperture to discover the cause of the uproar without, the seneschal pushed it violently open, and rushed in with his followers, demanding the cause of the strange proceedings of the new-comers. The centurion, without a word, pointed to a window, at which half hidden by a curtain, stood the Indian youth, before mentioned, with his back toward them. The seneschal strode to the spot, and gazed in the face of the Indian; a word in his ear caused him to start, and the curtain being close drawn, both remained concealed behind its folds for a few minutes, during which the seneschal's band remained silently awaiting the result, but closing up the entrance to the hall with their array.

Suddenly the curtains parted, and the seneschal gave an order that his guard should leave the hall, and speedily notify the whole legion of retainers to hold themselves in readiness to gather at a moment's notice to strike for the honor of the house of Cretolius. The wondering band slowly retired to obey his orders, closing the door behind them, which was instantly fastened by the seneschal.

Some time after, seven couriers left the castle gate, and during the lapse of another hour, nine horsemen rode into the courtyard at different times, dismounted, and were ushered into the great hall. None of the astonished retainers thronging the courtyard saw their faces, for they were hidden in the folds of their large cloaks, and their plumed helmets were so close upon the brow that their eyes only were visible. But the golden spur which graced their heels, and the graven work on their helmets, plainly indicated they were of the higher ranks of society.

As each entered the hall, the cloak was laid aside,

displaying the form of a Palmyrene noble, armed from head to foot as if for the fight. The last to arrive was Lord Morden, who was preceded but a few minutes by Lord Sicinius and his three sons, and around the poorly-dressed Indian they gathered—a duke, five lords, and three barons, each addressing a word of sympathy to the former as they took his hand. Upon the brows of all, rested a stern, determined expression, and in their eyes a look of thoughtful severity was mingled with mournfulness—for they were there to conspire against the peace of Palmyra, and to bring just punishment upon the guilty monarch who had dared to attempt to destroy the honor of one of their number, by tearing the fair Ida from her friends and home.

‘We must not give back in this enterprise,’ said Lord Sicinius, ‘for a principle is at stake. If the king is suffered thus with impunity to destroy the fair fame of one noble family, he will think himself privileged to do the same to others. Therefore we must persevere, for we might as well perish by the sword, as by the machinations of a despot.’

‘’Tis even so,’ said Lord Morden, ‘and we must now permit Everard to seek the king and demand the Lady Ida, and if she is not restored, sound the call to arms, and pluck the tyrant-spoiler from his throne. What say you, Everard?’

‘I am ready,’ said the Indian, for it was Everard in disguise. ‘But ere I go, let me know what chance of success we have in case of an appeal to arms.’

‘Lord Sicinius and his sons can bring four thousand to the field, the other three lords each two thousand,’ replied Lord Morden. ‘These, with my own legion of

two thousand, the duke's of three thousand, and your own, will make a force of eighteen thousand men.'

'Eighteen thousand against thirty-six thousand? 'tis fearful odds,' said Everard.

'Nay,' said Lord Sicinius, 'the king cannot have so many. At least, ten thousand of our citizens will neither fight against their king for us, nor for him in such an unjust cause as his, and consequently, will remain neutral, and if to this, we add a couple of thousand who will join our standards when the villany of our monarch shall have been sounded through the streets, our forces will be nearly equal.'

'Let us depart then, instantly,' replied Everard, 'for the palace.'

'One moment,' said the duke. 'Everard, it is best that when you face the king, you should, in case of his refusal to restore the beautiful Lady Ida, say nothing of our intentions, that our blow may be the surer for being unexpected.'

'Yes,' said Lord Morden, 'it is. And now let us seek our own castles, call together our retainers secretly, marshal them in our courtyards, and wait the decision of the king. Everard shall send us couriers to give us notice in case of his refusal.'

The mode of operations had been previously arranged by the nobles, and after Everard, who was to be the nominal leader, as he was the most injured, had received his instructions in attentive silence, the nine nobles left the castle, and separated to their different homes.

An hour after, having laid aside his Indian disguise, and wiped from his face the stains with which he had darkened it, Everard issued from the hall into the

courtyard, where nearly a thousand Cretolians were gathered, engaged in conversation on the strange events of the morning, and wondering what could have caused the orders they had received to be ready at a moment for the combat. His appearance, though it excited astonishment, was hailed with enthusiasm, and as he rode from the castle gate with the band who had accompanied him into the hall, he was followed by shouts of greeting.

Taking his way to the royal palace, he there found the couriers of the conspirators assembled. Dismounting, he entered the palace, and, luckily for himself, found the king in one of the ground apartments, looking into the avenue; when the lacquey who conducted him hither retired, he thus addressed the surprised monarch:

‘My liege, my unexpected return has filled you with astonishment, but you doubtless know the reason. I have come to demand of you my lovely sister, whom your minions have torn from the protection of the Baron De Montfort, by force, and for what purpose you best know. Where is she?’

‘Baron Cretolius, I have not looked upon her face since last she danced with me in the palace hall, on the evening when your father introduced the envoy of St. John,’ replied the monarch.

‘It is useless to evade my question,’ responded Everard, firmly. ‘I asked you not when you saw her. Again, I repeat it, where is she?’

‘I tell you, I know not; I knew she had disappeared, but whither I cannot tell,’ exclaimed the king.

‘Did you not send a band of assassins, headed by the villain Kasid, to abduct her? Did you not give

them shelter in the ruined quarter till your vile plans were completed? Tell me that?"

'And if I did, I have not seen or heard of her since.'

'King Iscora, it is in vain to attempt to deceive me. She is in this palace, and I must have her, or—'

'Or!' repeated the king, '*or!* Fool, it is well the sentence ceased there, for dare to utter a single threat, and you shall be tried for treason before a secret council, and your head placed over the city gate, a spectacle for a gaping multitude.'

'What say you? Wretch, ere that can happen, your own head shall roll on the ground, and your villanous soul shall have sped to its final place of punishment,' cried Everard in indignation. 'Now will you give me my sister, or see your palace fall in ruins upon your guilty head? for if you do not, you shall.'

Over the brow of the monarch the red flush of anger came in an instant, and his eyes flashed with the most ferocious rage. So uncontrollable was his passion that for a moment he was unable to speak. Recovering a little, he shouted in a voice of thunder, which seemed to shake the walls of the room:

'Would you beard the lion in his den? You shall see. Guards, guards, enter and seize this vile traitor. Bear him away from my sight. Throw him in the darkest dungeon, and leave him to seek his sister in Tophet. Quick, or your own heads shall fall in lieu of his; as I am a king, they shall.'

'Ravisher of innocence!' cried Everard, 'you will yet feel the vengeance due your iniquity, as well as be disappointed in this last attempt to destroy the brother of your first victim.'

As the guards burst open the door, Everard stooped quickly, and seizing a heavy-cushioned seat, of great weight, flung it violently against the window, shivering the light framework to pieces. Drawing a dagger, he struck it in the bosom of the foremost soldier who attempted to seize him, and rushing to the casement, sprang out into the street, and a minute after mounted his horse, saying to the couriers who awaited on their steeds :

‘ Away, to your masters, away, and tell them the worst has happened. Strike your spurs, I tell you ; wait not, but speed to your lords, for life and death is in your swiftness.’

His orders were obeyed implicitly, and away darted the couriers, just as the twenty or thirty guardsmen, who had pursued Everard through the casement by the king’s command reached him. The Cretolian retainers, seeing their young master in danger, lost not an instant in cutting to pieces his pursuers, and then followed his rapid course towards the castle of Cretolius, a half hour sufficing to bring them there.

The great gong on the keep of the lordly mansion was struck again and again, and as the dismal sound rolled far and near over the neighborhood, the bold retainers seized their arms, donned their coats of steel, and issuing into the streets made their way to the castle and gathered in its courtyard, with hundreds of others whom curiosity to know the cause of the uproar had brought thither.

When all were assembled Everard appeared on the great stairs, and calling to his heralds to sound their trumpets, soon restored silence :

‘ Men of Palmyra ; you have wondered why I have

so soon returned, and without my father and Lady Ida. It is because the fair flower of our house has been taken from us by a licentious ruler ; because your own peerless Lady Ida is now in the hands of one who seeks her ruin, and by her ruin would destroy the honor of our ancient house. To rescue her from her oppressor have I called you hither. What say you ; are you ready to follow me in this noble cause ?

Like one sound rose the angry voices of the three thousand Cretolians, and wrathful visages appeared on every hand. Mingled with the terrible cry, came the oft-repeated words, 'Lead us on ! lead us on !' 'We will die for the honor of our house.' 'Death to the ravisher !' 'Who hath done it ?'

Everard raised his hand to enjoin silence.

'You ask who hath done it ? On the honor of my name, it is none other than he who sent me to the distant land of the Turcoman, that during my absence and that of my father, he might accomplish his vile purposes, and pluck from you the flower of your pride—your Lady Ida. It is none other than the unworthy wretch who sways the sceptre of our realm ; and had it not been for my faithful band, who a short time since hewed some of his guard in pieces, I would now have slept in death, and my head have graced the battlements of the city. He sent us to Iconium, hoping that we might perish in the way ; but the gallant prince Selim saved us in the hour of peril from Hafed's wrath. Yes, the oppressor is your monarch, and ere night I shall lead twenty thousand Palmyrenes against him.'

'Death to king Iscora !' 'Vengeance and the Lady Ida !' 'Lead us on, lead us to the palace !' swelled out again upon his ear the angry notes of three thousand

tongues. Even the thousand citizens, drawn thither by mere curiosity, shouted: 'We will aid you.' 'We will stand by you.'

'You have said, lead us to the palace. I will, at once. To horse, to horse, my cavaliers; away, to the den of the spoiler.'

And soon five hundred horsemen, and five times as many footmen filed from the gate of the castle of Cretolius, under the command of Everard, near whom floated the ancient banner of the house of Cretolius. With cries of vengeance they took their way up the avenue in the direction of the royal palace, and while a few of the spectators joined their array, the rest scattered themselves, and rapidly spread the tale of dark wrong of which the king had been guilty.

When the conspiring nobles reached their respective palaces, in the morning after their conference with Everard, they despatched trusty couriers to the royal palace to await the young baron, and then proceeded to call their retainers together, and when they were assembled, proceeded to set before them the costliest viands and the most refreshing wines. The retainers knew there must be something unusual on hand, to cause this sudden call to arms, and numerous were their conjectures on the subject, none of which came anywhere near the truth. While they were yet occupied with their wine, the couriers from Everard arrived at their respective castles, with the brief message that the worst had come to pass.

Then the heralds proclaimed in the streets a call that all who wished to hear a strange tale should gather in the castle courts; and ere long, in nine lordly mansions was the perfidy of king Iscora proclaimed, to fifteen

thousand armed men, and five thousand citizens, while shouts of 'death to the tyrant!' made the welkin ring. Nine nobles called on their followers to rescue the flower of Palmyra, and fifteen thousand voices sent up the answer, 'Death to king Iscora!' Soon nine gallant legions started from as many different parts of the city, and took up their line of march beneath the banners of their lords, for the royal palace.

But these things did not pass unheeded by the guards and spies of the king, and the gongs of twenty castles rang out their alarm, calling their thousands to arms. The tale of Ida's abduction spread swiftly, and as Lord Morden had predicted, there were hundreds and hundreds who refused to fight, but determined to remain neutral.

The imperial legion of the guard consisted of four thousand men, but at least one half were on duty on the walls, or outside the gates. The rest were at the castle garrison, which stood within a short distance of the royal palace, and when Everard made his escape from the palace window, the king sent them orders to pursue him and seize the castle of Cretolius. Some time elapsed ere they were ready, and when at last they reached the street of palms they were met by a party of the guard, who informed them that the baron Cretolius was at the head of four thousand men, intending to advance upon the palace, and seize the king.

On hearing this, the general in command of the guard, perceiving the citizens were issuing from their dwellings in arms, fell back upon the palace, and informed his monarch the people were rising in all directions. While he was yet closeted with the king,

he sound of distant music was heard, and looking from the turret they descried the approaching legion of Cretolius. The approaches to the palace were instantly occupied by the imperialists, who were determined to defend it till succor should arrive from those nobles who were enemies to Cretolius, and would stand by the king.

When the Baron Everard, with his legion, arrived before the palace, they attacked the approaches with fury, and took one after another with the most gallant bravery, slaughtering the imperialists in large numbers. In vain was the resistance of the royal legion, for with the war-cry of 'Ida and vengeance,' and 'Cretolius for the realm,' the enraged Cretolians carried all before them, and were soon almost in possession of the left wing of the edifice.

In the meanwhile, three nobles with as many thousand men, who had come to the assistance of the king, had appeared before the right wing of the castle, and were ordered to enter. This they did, and their fresh warriors being placed in opposition to the Cretolians, whose numbers had been rapidly dwindling in the contest, they, with the aid of the imperialists, drove the tired Cretolians out of the wing, and pressed them closely as they retired down the avenue. Though discomfited, Everard's men preserved good order, while their pursuers broke their own ranks in their eager chase.

The scale of the battle was again turned, however, by the arrival of Lord Morden, with his legion, which placed the two parties on a more equal footing; and soon after, Lord Sicinius appearing in sight with his array, the royalists retired to the castle, and fought with their flank resting on it.

And now the whole city was in arms, and hurrying to the scene of conflict. Each party gained accessions to its strength, and the army of Everard having had the first call to arms, were all present, before the king had gathered half of his supporters.

Within the royal palace were ten thousand warriors determined to defend their monarch to the last, and looking anxiously for the reinforcements they knew were coming. Without, eighteen thousand men eagerly pressed forward to the rescue of the Lady Ida; and joyful were the royalists when their assailants fell back at Everard's command, but they did not pursue, fearing it was but a ruse to draw them from the shelter of the palace.

The Cretolian leaders, however, had merely retired to re-form their ranks, and change their plan of attack. Lord Morden, who was anxious to end the contest before the whole array of the king should be gathered, proposed to form their army in three divisions, himself and Lord Sicinius to lead five thousand against the right wing of the palace, the other nobles a like number against the centre, while the duke and Everard, with the remaining eight thousand, should assail the left wing, and attempt to take it, the two first divisions merely intending to divert the attention of the enemy.

The troops were reformed, and after the two first divisions had attacked the right wing and centre of the palace, with loud shouts, the division of Everard and the duke moved on the left wing in silence, and not till their forlorn hope (the knights of St. John led by Sebastian) had gained a footing in one of the casements, did they utter a sound. But then their voices rose in a chorus of exultation, and with the war-cry of

‘Ida and vengeance!’ they rushed forward under a storm of darts, leaving hundreds of their number in the blood-stained trenches, and fighting their desperate way over the sternly defended ramparts, succeeded in forcing the entrances and casements, and hewed a crimson path into the building, where the knights of Sebastian’s troop were already making sad havoc among the guardsmen of the imperial legion, to whom and a body of two thousand citizens, the defence of that part of the palace had been assigned.

In through the windows poured the gallant Cretolians and their allies, before whom the royalists were forced back into the centre of the edifice, while the other two divisions of the Cretolian army, by direction of Lord Morden, left their feigned attack, and followed their comrades through the casements of the left wing.

Now, in the centre of the building a fearful scene ensued, and it was not till the imperial guardsmen had nearly all perished, that the king ordered his array to fall back into the right wing; here, however, they were unable to maintain themselves more than an hour, and were finally driven out by the assailing army, and compelled to retire to the castle garrison. Before the Cretolian leaders could gather their men into proper order to pursue them, they were safe within its walls.

In the palace, ghastly corpses lay stretched upon sumptuous couches, blood stained the costly carpets, pale faces of dead men looked out from behind magnificent tapestries, and the purple tide of life flowed down the staircases, and dripped from the edges of balustraded balconies. Of the king’s followers four thousand had fallen, and of their opponents nearly an equal number rested in death.

A council of war was called, and by the advice of Lord Sicinius and the duke, it was resolved to hold the palace, as the king's superior numbers would give him the advantage when all his forces should have gathered, and the contest be renewed. The palace was examined from one end to the other, the dungeons opened, the turret cells searched, but to the surprise and grief of Everard, no traces of the Lady Ida could be found.

They discovered, however, a vault filled with gold coin, and in the attics, stores of grain sufficient to maintain their followers for a month, while wine in almost inexhaustible quantities stocked the cellars.

The soldiers were set at work removing the bodies, and fortifying the palace, so as to render it as strong as possible. In two hours their untiring exertions had rendered it impregnable to any other than a force double their number, and being thus placed in a position to resist any sudden assault of the king's troops, they turned their attention to preparing a hearty meal and refreshing themselves after the fatigues of the combat.

An hour after, the whole of the royalist forces had arrived, and the king ventured out of the castle garrison to review his army. After inspection, they were found to number seventeen thousand men, while the troops of Cretolius and his noble colleagues were now but fourteen thousand five hundred. They sent out spies, who returned in an hour with accurate information of the number and position of the enemy, and having learned how little superior in number they were, determined to march out against them the next morning, and settle the conflict at once, trusting in the justice of their cause.

Many of the imperialists had not yet heard the story of Ida, and although any conversation on the subject was forbidden by the king, yet it was whispered from one to another, among those who had been ordered out by their lords to 'put down a rebellion;' and at least a thousand, when they heard the cause of the rising, were filled with indignation, and determined to desert the royal standard that very night, and join the Cretolian array.

An hour after the royal review, the army of the king retired into the castle again, from whose summit waved the standard of the monarch, but the sun which soon set in blood in the west, saw the seven-starred banner of Cretolius floating from the keep of the imperial palace, and the blue plumes of his retainers keeping guard around the vacant throne.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Turcoman emirs, headed by Selim, return to Iconium. Interview of the emir with Lord Cretolius and D'Arville. Azalie. The love token. A plot of villany. A thrilling incident.

WHEN the emirs and chiefs of Ben Istam's tribe heard Selim's command, each separated to his party, and the various bands were soon on their return to Iconium. The knight, D'Arville, Lord Cretolius, and the retainers were conducted to the van of the array, where a thousand horsemen surrounded them as guards, with naked scimitars in hand. This body was ordered to proceed as rapidly as possible, and before noon, had left the main army far behind, and when, at twilight, they looked back from the summit of a hill, no signs of the sons of Ben Istam could be seen.

In the distance, northward, the eye of D'Arville saw a faint gleam, like that cast by the lights of a city into the evening air, and as they descended the hill, and darkness increased, the reflection in the air was brighter. For three hours their way now lay along a level plain, across which an indistinct whiteness beneath their

feet marked the road, while on either side, in the dimness, D'Arville saw at times the small tenements of the people, or the castellated mansions of the man of wealth; his eyes were ever open, and everything was taken particular notice of, as he knew not what adventures he might be called on to dare, and therefore he sought to gain as much knowledge as possible of the scenes in the midst of which he intended to prosecute his search for Azilla.

A turn of the road soon brought into sight a dark vista of trees, the forms of which were seemingly mingled with the gloom, but beyond a brightness told the position of the city gate. Ere long, this was opened to the approaching horsemen, and they entered, while a numerous body of guards near by, hearing that prince Selim was not only alive and well, but also present, gave him loud acclamations of welcome.

Others listened to these sounds, and the shopkeepers and inhabitants near by, while standing in silence to catch some note by which they might learn the cause of the uproar, distinguished the cries of 'Hail to the returning prince!' 'Allah preserve prince Selim!' and re-echoed them again and again, till spreading from tongue to tongue, the joyful news filled the city. Thousands crowded to the main street, that they might see with their own eyes the truth of the report, and welcome the hope of the warrior-tribe to his paternal home.

Brightly beamed the lamps in windows of bazaars and shops, and the light from them illuminated the streets through which the prince and his party passed, so that it seemed almost the brightness of day. In the centre of the city, surrounded by gardens, stood the palace of the emir of Ben Istam, and adjacent to it.

other palaces, the town residences of other emirs, raised their minarets toward the heavens.

‘ Arnil, prince of the Tigris, and Cretolius, ambassador of Palmyra, follow me, and I will lead you to the presence of my father. Hassan,’ continued the prince Selim, turning to an emir, ‘ I pray thee, conduct the troop of the Palmyrenes to good quarters, and send a messenger to acquaint their master with the place thereof. I will have the followers of Arnil cared for in my father’s palace.’

The three now entered the hall of the palace, and passing through it, and up a broad flight of stairs, halted in front of a door panelled with stained cedar. Eighty guardsmen were here, who prostrated themselves in the oriental fashion, upon their faces, till the prince with his companions had entered.’

At the further end of the room, on soft cushions, sat a man of about sixty years of age, whose white beard, which flowed upon his bosom to his girdle, and his snowy hair, gave him a venerable appearance. His dress was as magnificent as could be expected to be worn by one who ruled the hearts of a hundred thousand people, and directed the scimitars of a score of thousands of the boldest warriors of his race. As Selim entered, he dropped in surprise the cup from which he sipped, and springing up, with agility unusual to one of his age, held out his arms to Selim. The latter, bounded forward and fell upon his bosom, crying :

‘ The blessings of paradise be yours, my father.’

‘ Heaven has heard my prayers, brave son, and restored to my arms the hope of my house, has given back to me, in mercy, him whom I look to as the support of my declining years. My noble Selim, Allah has protected you.’

‘He has, my father, and now I hope he will aid me in saving from destruction an innocent and unoffending people, whose messenger, Lord Cretolius, I present to you as a friend. His son, it was, who, with a brave knight, rescued me from my danger, sought me in a fearful scene, and perilled his own safety to secure mine,’ replied Selim.

‘Is it so ?’ said the aged emir ; ‘ then let me embrace him. Lord Cretolius, if there is aught I can do to recompense the preserver of my gallant Selim, I am ready, even were it the tenth of my dominion.’

‘Noble emir, I thank you,’ responded Lord Cretolius, as he returned the warm embrace of the emir ; ‘but I seek not dominion or power. I merely ask that the children of Palmyra may be suffered to remain in peace and contentment. They seek no conquest, they cause no broils or discord ; and all they desire is to be permitted to pursue their even course unmolested.’

‘Sit with me on this divan ; but who is this prince ?’

‘His name is Arnil, prince of a tribe dwelling near the Tigris. He hath offered me his services, and his gallant demeanor and ready courtesy have led me to accept him as the chief of my guard ; with your permission, my father, I will retain him,’ answered Selim.

‘He is welcome, ever welcome,’ replied the emir, extending his hand. The knight raised it respectfully to his lips, and then, with a bow, said :

‘ Noble ruler of Ben Istam, thy name and fame, and that of thy warrior-son, Selim, hath spread even to the banks of the Tigris ; and I have come hither, attracted by your reputation in arms, to seek a field wherein to prove my valor, and take service with a leader whose ambition and courage will open a path for me to pow-

er. But let me not interrupt the wise counsels of the emir and the Palmyrene lord. I will retire to your casement, and occupy my time in watching the stars.'

D'Arville having done as he had said, the emir addressed Selim :

'Wherefore have the Palmyrenes sent this noble lord to ask for peace? As Mahomet is my guide, I think they did not much desire it, or they would not have attempted to do as Hafed said.'

'What said Hafed, my father?' responded Selim.

'He told us that you were torn from your saddle, hurried away to a secret spot, and there slaughtered. He also said that a youth of Palmyra, who secretly informed him of this, warned him to leave the city, as a plot was in contemplation to do likewise toward himself and the princess Azalie, and consequently he escaped while yet he might.'

'Hafed speaks not the truth,' replied Selim. 'He knows nothing of the cause of my disappearance, neither did he seek to know, for while the soldiers of the Palmyrene monarch sought me in every nook and corner of the city, he, for a whole day, remained quietly in his quarters, and quaffed the forbidden juice of the grape, laughing in his sleeves at the thought that now he would reign over Ben Istam's tribe alone. But I have sworn, by the beard of the prophet, that he shall not, and I can maintain it.'

'I love to see thy spirit, brave son of my heart, but do not let it cause discord in our dominions. Hafed and thou shall reign together. Besides, thou canst not meet him, for where are the gallant sons of Ben Istam, and the warriors of Laconia? Hafed hath them, and will not let them leave him,' said the emir.

‘Nay, my father. The warriors of our tribe I met this morning in the plain, and they have returned with me. They have decided to be ruled by me. Besides, the emirs of the mountains have promised to bring to my standard twenty thousand hardy mountaineers. Many more will join me when I raise my war-cry of “Death to the Greek !” and promise to lead them to the conquest of that empire.’

‘The warriors of Ben Istam are mine as yet, and shall not again leave Iconium ; so count not on their assistance in thy daring scheme, for my commands shall restrain them. Selim, say no more, lest my anger should be roused, and I do that which I would afterwards repent.’

‘My father, thou art my sire, and over me shalt thou rule. Allah give thee long life, and a thousand blessings. I go not forth, but, in obedience to thy command, stay at thy feet ; yet I pray thee, let not the innocent children of Palmyra suffer unjust punishment.’

‘Selim, thy virtue shall meet its due reward. I will heed thy last request, and at dawn I will send two princes to Hafed, to bid him return. Noble Cretolius, is not this a fitting reward for thy son’s rescue of Selim ? Is it not a great thing for an emir of Turcomania to give up the spoil of a rich city when almost within his grasp ?’

‘Generous emir,’ replied Lord Cretolius, ‘would that I could repay you !’

When D’Arville had retired to the casement, as before mentioned, he gazed through it, but nothing met his view except the stone wall of a house, or part of the palace, a few feet distant. In this he perceived a small window, the casings of which were wrought with gold ;

a light was within, but a curtain obscured his vision, and he could see nothing of the room which it hid. His thoughts involuntarily turned to Azalie, and his imagination pictured her seated upon a soft cushion, or reclining on a couch, absorbed in thoughts of him, and he ardently wished to see the curtain withdrawn, to know if fancy pictured the truth.

Wrapt in contemplation, he stood concealed by the deep shadow of the window and the tapestry behind him. As he looked, the hangings before the opposite casement were drawn aside, and to his delight the face of her on whom his thoughts dwelt appeared. She leaned her lovely face upon her soft hand, and gazed thoughtfully upward. The heart of D'Arville beat wildly with emotion, and, unable to resist the impulse, he leaned slightly forward in the shade, and whispered.

A few feet of space only intervened between them, and his fond look could plainly distinguish her features. No movement on her part seemed to indicate that she heard aught, save at the first a slight start, after which, she remained gazing upward, but into her cheeks flushed a warmer glow, and her eyes, steadfastly fixed on the stars, beamed with a pleased expression.

‘Beautiful Azalie, sweet vision, on the faith of my knighthood, it seemeth that I am in a dream. Do I again behold that glance which so brightly beamed on me in the hall of Palmyra ; again see those love-lit eyes, that beauteous countenance, that queenly form ! Azalie, O believe me, I love thee, I love thee dearly, and for thee will I dare every peril—to win thee I will gladly meet every danger that intervenes, and overcome them . Dost thou doubt my love ? Give me a mission to perform, send me on some dangerous service, and if I fail,

then say I love you not. Azalie, Azalie, do you not hear me? I am D'Arville, the envoy of St. John; have I no place in your memory? Speak, speak, dear vision. Let me know that you hear me! O, heavens, my heart! She does not heed me, she cares not for me!

The knight leaned his head upon the casement-sill, and covered his face with his hands, while warm drops of agony stood on his forehead, and the pulsations of his enthusiastic heart were quick and loud. Bitter thoughts filled his soul, fears that she did not love him crossed his mind, and the world seemed a blank to him. Careless of himself, he groaned aloud in the anguish of his soul, and clenching his hands, raised his head with an imploring look, towards—

But she was not there. The window, from which she had beamed like a star of hope upon his vision, was darkened. He gazed in silence a moment, and then dropped his eyes sadly to the floor on which he stood. A start of delighted surprise, a thrill of joy—there, at his feet, lay a half-blown rose,—could he believe it—she had thrown it toward him ere she disappeared, and while his face was hidden by his hands. But then painful doubts came, as he stooped to pick it up—it might have been there before—some menial of the palace might have dropped it there. He had not seen it before, however, and he had looked to the floor when he took his place at the window—he had looked to see where he was stepping, and no rose met his view.

Hope filled his bosom, as this last thought impressed itself as a certainty upon his mind; taking his turban from his head, he fastened the rose above the diamond loop which confined the scarlet folds, and replaced it

on his brow. Turning his back to the window he stood in surprise, for there a few paces distant stood the prince Selim. In vain the knight gazed in his eyes, in vain tried to read their expression, and his stout heart rose in defiance of any coming danger. Suddenly changing the impenetrable look of his countenance, Selim advanced with a smile :

‘ Did I not hear you groan ? Prince Arnil, if aught disturbs you, if aught harasses you, if there is anything you would discover, or any treasure you would gain, confide in me the secret which so oppresses you, and I will give you my warmest aid.’

The knight started again, and gazed wistfully into the smiling face of the prince. Had Selim discovered his secret, had his eyes penetrated the Saracen disguise, and recognized beneath it the knight who had saved him from starvation and a dungeon ? No, it could not be.

‘ Why do you not speak, prince Arnil ? Does pain rack your limbs, or is it distress of the mind that disturbs you thus ? If the latter, tell me, and I will sympathize with you.’

‘ Nay, noble Selim,’ replied D’Arville, ‘ it was but momentary, and is all over now. A sudden pang thrilled my heart, but it has passed away. I thank you for your kind offer ; it was well meant, and Arnil treasures it in his heart as the kindness of a friend.’

‘ My father, and the Lord Cretolius, are leaving the hall, to seek the room in which we partake of refreshments. I am rather hungry after my long journey, and I doubt not you are also, brave Arnil, therefore let us follow them, and assist in their laudable endeavors,’ said Selim.

Taking the arm of the knight in a friendly manner, Selim led him from the window, while a strange smile played around the mouth of the prince, and a mischievous pleasantness lurked in his eye. The perplexed D'Arville knew not what to think of this, and in thoughtful silence suffered the prince to conduct him to a well-filled table, on the cushions around which they soon reclined, engaged in discussing various subjects at the same time they satisfied their hunger.

Slaves of exquisite beauty surrounded the tables, and ran hither and thither in obedience to the slightest sign of their master ; before the knight and Lord Cretolius they placed the choicest viands, and while the noble, whose appetite was sharpened by the joyful and unexpected success of his mission, ate plentifully, D'Arville seemed unable to swallow a mouthful, but sipped occasionally of the refreshing beverage which filled the vase beside him—the purest wine of Persia.

Selim's eyes were continually glancing to the face of the knight, and at last, he broke out into a hearty laugh, which he had for some time been striving in vain to restrain. The emir and Lord Cretolius looked up from their conversation in surprise, and Selim, when he was able to command his voice, cried :

‘Forgive my rudeness, father, but by the beard of Mahomet, I could not help laughing when I looked upon the rueful face of prince Arnil. One would think, from his sighs and thoughtful looks, that he was in love. See, it is so,—the tell-tale color rises into his cheek. Mahomet help me, but if he hath seen any sweet face in his course through our city, which hath warmed his heart, he need but to speak, and she shall be his. And see the rose in his turban—it is a fresh one, and I

should say had not been two hours plucked from the bush. Poor fellow, he has been dreaming of her continually for the last hour.'

The aged emir and the noble smiled as they looked at D'Arville, over whose face the blush of confusion had spread itself. This was but momentary, for calling his pride to his aid he recovered himself, and looking meaningly at Selim, who was opposite him, said:

'And does not prince Selim know that the roses which bloom on the banks of the Euphrates are sweeter than those of the mountains? Are not the flowers which open their petals amid the Syrian desert more fragrant than those which expand in loveliness upon the fertile plains of Turcomania? Are the emeralds and rubies of the north brighter than the diamonds of the south? Now it is your turn to blush, my gallant prince, now doth confusion cover the face of the pride of Ben Istam. But think not of it too despairingly. She will fill the throne of a queen with gracefulness, and her powerful intellect is fitted to rule the hearts of millions as well as that of Selim; and doubtless she will ere long do the first as well as the last, if I can judge aright.'

A smile of joy crossed Selim's face, and moved his blushing cheek; D'Arville had looked for surprise, but was himself astonished at seeing no signs of such a feeling. This gave rise to a new train of thought, into which he suffered his mind to relapse, while the emir and Lord Cretolius gazed inquiringly upon the face of Selim.

The hour of rest approached, and at the emir's signal, a number of slaves, bearing lights and perfumery, preceded the knight and Lord Cretolius to their different

apartments. At the request of the knight, three of his troop were conducted to his room, after which, he dispensed with other attendance, and sent away the slaves.

The rooms he now found in his occupation consisted of two ante-rooms and a large chamber, the latter of which was lighted in the day-time by a large arched window. Looking from it, he found that he was in one of the upper stories of the palace, whence he could look down into the courtyard beneath, and upon the pile of buildings surrounding it, which were then illuminated by variegated lanterns and blazing torches. In the ante-rooms were double beds; two of his attendants took up their quarters in one, while the other knight, pushing the bed in the outer room close against the door, composed himself to rest.

D'Arville threw aside his dress, and retired to the couch which stood in an alcove of the great chamber. The lights being carried out into the ante-room, he closed his eyes, and endeavored to sleep, but for some time his thoughts kept him awake. Among other things which puzzled him, was the inexplicable conduct of prince Selim, who had previously treated him as an inferior, but since discovering him in the window placing the rose in his turban, had behaved towards him as a brother. At last his heavy eyelids closed, and he sunk into a quiet slumber.

How long he had slept he knew not, but he was aroused by a heavy hand on his shoulder. He started up, as the voice of the trooper who slept in the outer ante-room met his ear :

‘Sir Percy, there are voices outside my door, carrying on a whispered conversation, and from a few words

I caught I should judge there was some foul work going on.'

D'Arville rose, and going to the ante-room, with the assistance of his attendants softly removed the bed. Gently opening the door, he put his ear to the aperture, after causing the lights to be carried into the inner chamber, and listened.

'By the beard of Mahomet, we will never have such another chance to win the promised reward. Why should you falter now?' said a voice without, to which another replied:

'I do not wish to falter, but it is a fearful risk; should he awake, our course would be ended.'

'Nay, he cannot, for his slaves are drugged, and we managed to wake him so early this morning that he will sleep well.'

'Are you sure of the reward?'

'Did I not tell you I have half of it at home? Now, by the prophet's beard, thou art as babyish as an infant a month old. I have here the powder, and all you have to do is to drop it in the cup which stands at his bedside, while I hold my knife over him to plunge it in his bosom should he chance to awake.'

'I care not; lead on, and I will perform my part.'

The voices ceased, and soft footsteps passed the door, and proceeded along the entry. D'Arville, ordering his followers to await his return, seized his sword, and stepping into the corridor with bare feet, followed the course of the two whisperers. After tracing them about fifty yards, he came so close to them as to see the indistinct outlines of their forms, against the dim light of the distant casement. Here they suddenly

stopped, and D'Arville held his breath, fearful of discovery.

The light creak of a softly turned latch met his ear, and then he saw the crevice of an opening door. The two figures in front of him were plainly visible in the light from within, as they pushed the door open and entered with catlike tread. One of them dropped something just outside the sill, and the knight saw they were most magnificently dressed. The next moment the door closed, and D'Arville was left in darkness. Creeping forward, he felt around with his hand, and picked up the article they had dropped, which was a piece of cloth of some soft texture. Placing this in his bosom, he turned to retrace his steps.

After he had returned the distance he supposed he had tracked the two whisperers, he sought in vain for the door of his apartment, and softly called the names of his servitors. No answer was returned, and for some time he wandered about, not knowing whither he was going, seeking his room. At last, with characteristic daring, he determined to try one door after another till he found his own, and after finding five or six fastened, one yielded to his pressure, and then his feet pressed a cushioned carpet.

Upon the floor, at his feet, lay four Ethiopians, whom from their dress he imagined to be eunuchs. This opinion was confirmed, when by the light which beamed from a room beyond, he saw various articles of female apparel, upon a couch. Hesitating a moment to assure himself the eunuchs were indeed asleep, he removed their glittering scimitars, and laying them one side, covered them with a piece of embroidery near at hand,


that the sleeping guards might not despatch him should they suddenly awake.

This was done in consequence of a sudden determination he had made, to take the light from within, and use it as a means of finding his own room. Softly passing into the adjoining apartment, he was about to remove the light, when, glancing through another door, his attention was riveted, and his heart bounded with emotion, for there upon soft cushions, stretched in peaceful repose, lay the princess Azalie. The coverlet was drawn close over her snowy neck, but a vivid color was in the cheeks, on which rested her long black eye-lashes.

A few minutes passed, yet the knight stirred not from his entranced position, for with one hand upon the lamp, and the other resting on the polished cedar, he stood gazing in rapt admiration on the features of her he loved. A movement of one of the sleeping eunuchs without called him to a sense of his dangerous situation—dangerous in more ways than one, and carefully shading the light with his hand, he crept softly through the ante-room to the entry, and closing the door, took a survey of the corridor.

Finding himself in an unknown part of the house, he went back some distance, and coming upon a place where six passages met, he easily saw how he had mistaken his course, and finding that in which his own room was situated, by the color of the tapestry, soon was at his own door again.

Here he found his men anxiously waiting his return, but as he was about entering, loud cries met his ear, and the footsteps of men echoed through the corridors. Blowing his light out he listened, and came to the



conclusion that the eunuchs had awoke from their sleep, and finding some one had been in their room, and missing the light and their arms, had given the alarm.

Hastily entering his apartment he went to the window, opened it, and flung the lamp he had found in the princess's boudoir as far as his energetic arm could send it, over the adjoining buildings, till he heard the heavy brass strike with a ringing sound on the roof of a distant wing, and then fall rattling down into the courtyard below.

Returning again to the entry he looked out, and heard loud exclamations of anger, mingled with expostulations and entreaties. Lights soon appeared coming up the entry, and as he saw that Selim, the emir, Lord Cretolius, and a number of princes had issued from their rooms to see what was the cause of the uproar, with their followers increasing the throng, D'Arville, cautioning his men not to mention what had passed, sallied out with them and made many eager inquiries, as if he knew nothing of the matter.

The aga of the eunuchs told the emir that while they were asleep, some persons had managed softly to break open the door of the princess Azalie's room. He said, that on awaking, and missing these articles, they had given the alarm, and after running up and down the corridors, had at last discovered the two princes whom they here had prisoners, just attempting a dangerous escape from a window.

The emir directed that the princes should be confined in their rooms, with a strong guard, till he should on the morrow have time to prove their innocence or guilt, and they were accordingly conducted thither. The crowd opened, and as the prisoners passed, D'Arville,

he recognized them as being the two men whom he had traced along the entry, and of whose features he had obtained a view when they entered the apartment as before mentioned.

Seeking his room again, D'Arville took from his bosom the article he had picked up, at the time the whisperers had dropped it, and found it to be an embroidered handkerchief on which was stamped a coat of arms, and the letters, 'A. P. S.'

CHAPTER XV.

Selim's disappointment. The page. The knight's confusion. His adventure. The princess in her harem. The eunuchs. The knight a prisoner. Dungeons.

THE emir had said that at dawn he would hold a council, and inquire into the guilt or innocence of the two princes who had been arrested in the entry of his palace; but this he was destined never to do, for his time had come, and he was doomed, by an unseen hand, to inevitable destruction.

At dawn, when his attendants sought to awake him, they found him in a troubled sleep, while over his brow was spread the crimson flush of fever, and his cheeks were like fire to the touch. The prince Selim was called, who, on perceiving the state of the case, sent instantly for those learned men of physic, who were, by their skill and knowledge, entitled 'the sons of wisdom,' and their services reserved entirely for the nobles and chiefs.

These doctors, after looking upon the aged emir, seemed unable to discover the nature of his disease, and informed the prince, that when twenty-four hours

should have elapsed, and the sickness become more fully developed, they would give him the desired information. Till that time they ordered him to be kept perfectly quiet, forbidding the admittance of any person to his apartment.

The knight and Lord Cretolius were extremely sorrowful when they heard the news, as the generous old chieftain had already won their respect, and they regarded him as the worthiest of the Turcoman race they had ever conversed with, for he had proved himself the friend of the innocent and unoffending, by promising his protection to the Palmyrenes, the previous night.

Lord Cretolius hinted to Selim, that the messengers had not yet been sent, and the prince, on whom now devolved the government, in consequence of the sickness of his father and absence of Hafed, called two trusty chiefs, and delivered to them the mission to his brother, as also the news of the emir's sudden sickness, and bade them request his immediate return. Having received their instructions, the messengers departed, with a strong guard, and were soon on their rapid way to the Turcoman army which threatened the distracted city of the Syrian desert.

Lord Cretolius was himself anxious instantly to return to Palmyra, but this Selim strenuously opposed.

'Nay,' said he, 'noble Cretolius, it may not be. Should you fall in with Hafed's array, and you cannot reach Palmyra without, it may be that not even your age and mission would protect you from violence. Besides, my brother's cruel and relentless disposition may lead him to put you to death, for it is not likely that he will care for the mandates of my father I have

sent by those two chiefs, but will take his own imperious course, and doom to destruction your beautiful city. I think my messengers will return in a fortnight, and then, should he refuse to obey, my father's friends will aid me in marching against the disobedient, rebellious son, and ere three weeks we can raise the siege. Think you your city can hold out against him that time ?

‘I cannot tell, for I know not what his forces are.’

‘Seventy thousand of the warriors of our race are with him, but none of Ben Istam's tribe,’ replied Selim.

‘Against them, even though led by the Lion of Turkestan, we could defend the city for a month,’ said Lord Cretolius.

‘Then think no more of it, but wait the return of my messengers. Should my dear father perish, I fear there will be wild work. But come, noble sir, and you my gallant brother, Arnil, let us descend to the hall of judgment, and pass a few hours in listening to the decisions of the cadis of our tribe.’

The two guests followed their youthful host, and while passing down the corridor, engaged in conversation on the events of the past night, and the strange conduct of the two chiefs who were charged with entering the room of the princess Azalie. It was difficult for the knight D'Arville, who was the very soul of honor, to take part in this conversation, and carry on the deception necessary to screen himself from suspicion. His act had been harmless in itself, and had he known beforehand that it was her room into which he was about to enter, he would sooner have died than crossed its threshold. Had he been discoy-

ered there his death would have been sure and sudden, for the eunuchs, fearful of losing their own heads in punishment for their negligence in not fastening the door, would have hewn him in pieces with their scimitars. As it was, they were unable to trump up anything but a suspicious story, and when their weapons were afterwards found, so carefully stowed away beneath the piece of tapestry, they were thrown into a cell to await the orders of the emir.

When near the foot of the stairs several pages of the harem appeared, and after saluting the prince, one held up a bruised and battered piece of brass, saying:

‘Light of the faithful, noble prince Selim, this shapeless piece of metal was found at the foot of the wall of the western wing, directly beneath the window the two gallants, Ali and Mustapha, were discovered trying to escape from, and arrested by the eunuchs. It is the lamp taken from the apartment of the princess Azalie last night.’

‘Now by the beard of the prophet, it shall be hard with them,’ cried Selim, ‘this is another proof against them. They have evidently thrown it from the window, that it might not be discovered, and become a silent witness against them. This is what I heard last night in the midst of the uproar; an unusual clanking sound met my ear, just as I left my room, and it seemed to ascend from the courtyard. Bring the knaves before me, and I will myself examine them, and see if I can discover any signs of guilt in their demeanor or countenances.’

While the prince was speaking, D’Arville, to hide his evident confusion, drew back into the rear of the group. One of the pages, on whose turban a rosebud

was placed, watched his opportunity, and stepping suddenly up to the knight, whispered :

‘ Does the prince Arnil know nought of the matter ? Has he not seen a lump of brass take wings and fly through the midnight air ? Has he never touched the shining weapon of a eunuch ? Has he never seen a charming princess in her slumbers ? ’

Deeply crimson was the brow of the knight, as he turned toward the questioner, with a sudden start, but the next moment his face became pale as death ; compressing his lips, he gazed with an unconcerned look upon the scene, and the page who had spoken, with a smile, whispered :

‘ Cherish the rosebud which hath been torn from its parent stem, and it may yet bloom in thy bosom and unfold its delicate petals beneath the sun of love. He who seeketh the pride of the north, must prove himself the bravest and the truest—he who would win the star of Laconia, must fear no danger. Ere you can pluck the rose, you must remove the thorns. ’

The voice ceased, as the door in front was thrown open, and D’Arville followed Selim and Lord Cretolius into a sort of raised balcony, whence they looked down upon an assemblage of people, in every imaginable dress, who hailed the appearance of their prince with loud acclamations. In different parts of the hall which presented itself to their view, were four judges, employed in dispensing justice to those of the tribe who sought it, and the litigations of the sons of Ben Istam were in course of settlement. A silence prevailed, however, as soon as the prince made his appearance, and when the two prisoners were brought before him, the spectators became very curious to know what

charge was about to be brought against the two chieftains, Ali and Mustapha.

‘Princes of Ben Istam, wherefore did you enter the chamber of the princess Azalie, last night?’ said Selim.

‘We did not, my liege, we are guiltless of the charge.’


‘What! did not you drop from the window of the western corridor this lamp? Look at it, and see if this proof of your guilt is not convincing. This was found beneath the window.’

‘My lord, we know nothing of it. As we opened the casement we heard the sound of falling metal in the courtyard beneath, but knew not what it meant,’ replied one of the princes.

‘Stand forth, aga of the eunuchs, and tell what you saw.’

‘My liege, in passing the end of the western corridor, we heard footsteps, and running in that direction heard the casement at the termination of it open, and at the same moment, by the light of our torches saw the hand of one of them thrown quickly forward. The next moment, the sound of the falling brass met our ears, and we then caught the princes half way out of the window.’

‘This is proof enough for me,’ cried Selim; ‘take them away, and confine them in the deepest dungeon. My will is that they die, but while my father lives they must be reserved for his judgment. By Mahomet, I will teach them to intrude upon the privacy of a princess of our house. Yet, stay, I would ask them, since they deny all knowledge of this, what they were doing in the entry of that part of the palace, and what



right they had there at all? Speak, knaves, and answer if you can?"

The princes seemed greatly confused, but at last one of them managed to stammer forth a few scarcely intelligible words:

'My prince, we—we were there—we wished to see—to see the emir—that is—we went to ask of him a petition.'

'Away with the faltering hounds—away with the false-tongued dogs. Guards, obey,' shouted Selim, in a voice of thunder.

They were removed, and the prince, after ordering the business of the hall to be resumed, retired with his guests to the courtyard, and ordered their steeds to be saddled. After making inquiry of the physicians, he was informed that the emir was no worse than at the dawn, and the party then started on a tour of the city, the prince being desirous of giving them as much pleasure during their stay as possible.

The day and evening were passed pleasantly, and at his usual hour the knight left the hall, after the evening meal, to retire to his own apartment. On his way thither he passed an open casement, and seeing a balcony without, he stepped into it to enjoy the fresh breeze a moment. This balcony he found ran along the whole outer part of the wing, and was surrounded with close blinds on both sides, so that none in the courtyard below could see those who might chance to walk there.

The knight passed saunteringly along, looking around, but there was nothing to be seen but the sky above, and the interminable range of blinds on either side. Reaching the end of the balcony, he found a

small lattice, which he pushed open, and leaning his face on his hand gazed upward into the starry heavens, as if essaying to read in their blue depths some page of his future destiny, or see some omen favorable to the success of his half-formed plans. After thinking long upon the vow he had made two weeks before, and reviewing the chances for its accomplishment, his thoughts reverted to the lovely princess who had enchained his heart, and he ardently longed for an opportunity of seeing her alone, and pouring into her ear his tale of love.

He had thought himself unnoticed when he entered the balcony, but a light footstep tracked his amid the darkness, creeping close to the dark latticed balustrades, and a youthful face was near his, and watchful eyes marked every expression of his countenance, while he gazed upward. There was a roguish look in the glance with which his unnoticed neighbor regarded him, and a smile on the slightly parted lips.

‘Prince Arnil, art thou used to star-gazing? Come with me and I will show you stars worth looking at. I will show you brighter stars, whose beams will not seem so cold as those you now look upon, and in their sparkling beauty you will be more apt to read your destiny. Wilt thou follow?’

D’Arville turned in surprise, and distinguished the features of the page who had whispered to him in the morning, and the rosebud in his turban rendered the identity more certain.

‘I will follow,’ said the knight, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘for my spirit of adventure is now fairly aroused, and even if you lead me to the regions of despair, and throw me into the power of a wicked angel,

I will follow thee. But I think, that one who wears the same colors in his cap, will not lead me far astray.'

'Prince Arnil, you forget, we Moslem call them not caps, but turbans, so you must weigh your words ere you speak, or you will be discovered.'

'St. John !' exclaimed the knight, 'what mean you?'

'Nothing, only if you call things by Frankish names, if you call a turban a cap, and use the name of St. John instead of that of Mahomet, 'as you did just now, your disguise will be of little avail,' replied the page.

'My disguise, slave, what mean you, by talking thus to a prince of the Tigris ? By the beard of Mahomet, I could throw thy—' D'Arville stopped suddenly, for by the faint light of the stars he could perceive a smile on the face of the page, of rather an incredulous import. At the same moment he heard a low laugh near at hand. Looking around he perceived no one, but thought there was a slight movement of the blinds close to him, in the side of the wing.

'Come, Sir Percy D'Arville, come my gallant prince Arnil, follow me, and do not attempt to deceive me any longer. I know all, mind, I say ALL, and so it is useless for you to think of concealing aught. Nay, speak not, ask no questions, for I can give no answers. Follow, and I will fulfil the promise I made a few moments since.'

Having said this, the page moved away, and the astonished D'Arville, wondering at the knowledge of the strange visitant, followed closely, with a firm heart, and a resolute spirit, determined to trace the mystery to its conclusion, and see what the sequel would be. Passing a few of the tiers of blinds, the page came to a lattice, and entered, taking the hand of the knight to

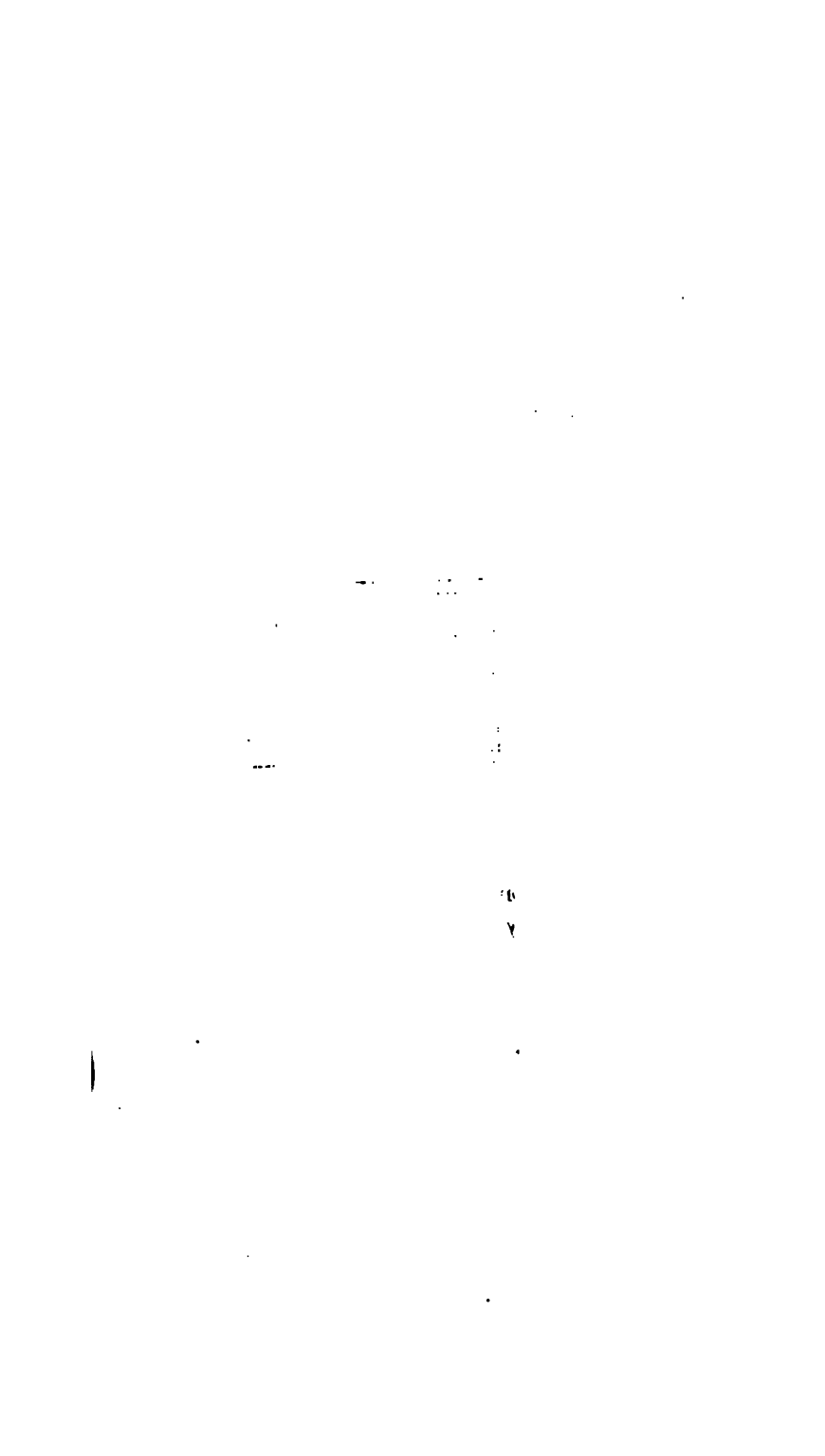
lead him through the darkness within. To D'Arville's imagination it seemed as if they were going a great distance, for he was led up and down innumerable flights of stairs, through many corridors, and at last stopped before a half-open door.

Through this, sweet perfumes were wafted to the outer air, and the soft cadence of delicious Turkish music vibrated among the hangings. He was led in, and a page who conducted him, withdrew his hand, and disappeared, after whispering :

' Now, if thou wouldst see the stars, in which beth thy destiny, advance fearlessly till a sight shall open upon thy vision fairer than the sunny plains of Persia are to the dwellers in a mountain land. Fear not, say, noble D'Arville, fear not, but remember that a heart like thine is welcome, and a generous action as you performed in Palmyra merits a sweet reward.'

D'Arville remained a few moments where the page had left him, for the sudden transition from the darkness of the corridors through which he had passed to the dazzling effulgence of light which reigned in the room, oppressed his sight, and rendered him for a few minutes unable to see anything. He held his hand to his face a few moments, to enable him to see better, and when he partly removed his hand from his eyes, to his astonishment he discovered that every lamp in the room was extinguished except one.

His surprise having passed off, he stepped forward to the next apartment, and stopped in the centre of the room to notice the furniture and appointments, which were magnificent in the extreme. Going forward, he moved through several rooms, each more splendidly furnished than the last, but in none of them could he find a



PRINCESS AZALIE, THE FLOWER OF BEN ISTAM'S PALACE.



Unexpected entrance of the gallant knight into the presence of the princess Azalie.—See page 207.

person. At the door of the fifth he ceased his course, and seemed to hesitate, for within, with her back toward him, sat a female arrayed in the most superb style, around whose snowy neck glittered a necklace of rubies.

No veil covered her head, but from within the circling coronet of diamonds which graced it, descended glossy curls upon her beautiful shoulders—curls of the most lovely auburn; and as the knight looked, he imagined it to be the lady of his love. A slight movement on his part, a slight change of position, caused him to strike his mailed arm unintentionally against the door-casing, and the lady quickly turned her head, alarmed at the sound.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

The next moment, D'Arville was at her feet, and before his glance the eyes of Azalie drooped in modesty, while the rich blood mounted to her lovely face. No word was spoken by either, but long and earnestly did the knight gaze into her bewitching countenance, while his heart beat wildly with delight, and his bosom thrilled with ardent longings to clasp her fairy-like form in his embrace.

'Azalie, dear Azalie, dost thou not know me? Lovely being, tell me, do you never think of him whose every thought is of thee? Do you never dream of him whose head never presses the pillow but his fancy pictures your loved image to his mind? Do you never implore for him safety and success? Sweet being, with thee my happiness will be perfect, if thou wilt but consent to be mine? Dear Azalie, wilt thou not tell

me if my suit is acceptable ? Be mine, and I will defend thee through every danger, I will take thee to my distant home, in the sunny isle of Cyprus, and there shall everything which delights the senses be yours, and the gifts of heaven be showered upon you. And in the stormy scenes of a warrior's life, gallant knights will speak thy name when they shout St. John and victory, and noble leaders will wear thy favors in their helmets.'

The maiden raised her eyes quickly to his, as if to read the thoughts of his heart, and then, dropping them again to the floor, softly murmured :

'Would you have the Moslem maiden leave the home of her fathers ? Would you have the young dove leave the nest of the parent bird, and fly with the hawk to his distant woods ? Would you have the Mahometan girl leave her friends and her religion, and seek with you your native land, where Christians will sneer at her because her religion is different from theirs ?'

'Sneer at you ! they would not dare to, for my trusty sword would fly from its sheath, and the base wretch who dared to say aught against the bride of Percy D'Arville, should perish at the moment. He who would dare insult Azalie, my own sweet Azalie, should meet me in a fair field, and receive the reward of his temerity. Dear Azalie, I love you, and by the token which graces my turban, I pray thee be mine. Will you not, gentle girl, be the rose in my crown forever ?'

'Percy, is it for me that you have dared the perilous journey hither ? Is it for me you have assumed this disguise ; and thus penetrated these closely-guarded chambers ? Was it for my sake you left the festive halls and magnificent homes of Palmyra, friends and

all, and came hither in a Saracen dress, among those who know you not? Did you dare the dangerous undertaking, in whose discovery will be certain death, in hope of winning me as your bride?" said Azalie.

'Nay, fair princess,' replied the knight, 'I may not say that all you have asked me is true, for I would tell no untruth. I came hither in performance of a vow I made, to seek a lady and her daughter of whom I never heard but once. I knew I should find thee here, and that thought impelled my speed, and aided in turning my course hitherward.'

'Then you came to seek other ladies, and you talk to me of love. Is this so, or not?' asked Azalie.

'It is, but look not so on me, lest you would tear my heart from its resting-place. I seek them not for myself, but for another, and in pursuance of the customs of my knightly order, I have made a vow to restore them to their home. The lady was torn from a happy dream of bliss and her husband's arms, long years ago, by some of the warriors of Ben Istam's tribe, and with her infant daughter was carried away captive.'

'And what became of the father—does he live?' asked Azalie.

'Yes, but ever since that fatal moment he has been a raving maniac. I heard his pitiful story, and I vowed never to rest till I should have found her, and restored her to his arms. And would you, for this, blame me?'

'Nay, gallant knight, but hold thee more worthy of my—of my—my—friendship—of the friendship of my brother, Selim.'

'But Azalie, will you never think of me, will you

never bid me hope ? Tell me, Azalie, tell me, if I have a place in your heart ? Tell me that I am sometimes in thy thoughts. Lovely queen of beauty, speak to me.'

D'Arville,' softly murmured she 'when you have fulfilled your vow, I will answer you. Press forward gallantly to its accomplishment, and when thou canst return to me, and with thee conduct to my presence the lost lady and her child, then thou mayst hope to call Azalie thine. You whispered last night from the window of my father's hall, you asked me to tell you what you could do to prove your love. Go then, and perform your vow, and I will deem you worthy of my love.'

The knight respectfully touched her hand to his lips, and then softly approached her face with his own. She moved not her head, but while the blush deepened on her cheek, she suffered him to take a kiss from her ruby lips. It was a moment too delicious not to be repeated, and not till the third time did the lady move her head. Bidding her farewell, he was about to press her hand to his lips again, when she spoke :

'Stay,' said she, 'what was the name of this lady who you say was torn from her home. I would not ask you at this moment of parting, such a question, but perhaps I can find means to aid you in your search.'

'Her name, sweet Azalie,' replied D'Arville, 'was Azilla.'

The lady started—'Azilla ! O, heavens, and can it be that—that—that—my mother was—'

'Ha !' cried D'Arville, 'are we discovered ? Now then I am doomed to death.'

'Azalie's eyes followed the direction of the knight's, and there at the door by which he had entered, a dark

face peered out from behind the tapestried hangings around it. It was the face of an aga of eunuchs.

‘Fly, Percy, fly,’ said she; ‘here, through this side-door.’

He sprang to the door pointed out by Azalie, and opened it. A dozen eunuchs sprang out with flashing scimitars, and the knight, while recoiling from their rushing phalanx, seized a heavy chair from the floor, and whirling it violently around his head, knocked half of them senseless upon the ground, and with other blows disabled the others. His valor was vain, for others poured in through another door, and a sudden blow from behind laid him at the feet of Azalie.

The aga of eunuchs rushed forward to complete his destruction, but the princess threw herself on his prostrate form, and wreathed her arms about his neck. Three of the eunuchs attempted to raise her, but she resisted till the aga promised not to injure the knight, whom he knew to be a friend of prince Selim, till the latter should have seen his sister. The aga swore to keep his word by the beard of Mahomet, and the princess, knowing that the aga never violated such an oath, rose and stood mournfully gazing, while the guards raised the half-revived knight, and bound him hand and foot.

He was borne through a small door, into a corridor which passed downwards in the thick wall. They had scarcely disappeared, when a youth in a page’s dress passed before the astonished Azalie, and after bidding her fear not, for all would yet be well, disappeared through the same aperture, as that through which his captors had conveyed the knight.

Down four long flights of narrow stone steps was the

knight led, till at last the feet of the eunuchs pattered upon the floor of the damp dungeons beneath the castle. Bearing their prisoner along through an arched way for some distance, they laid him down at length before a dungeon door, and proceeded to withdraw the bolts which fastened it without.

The only lamp they had was borne by one of the inferior eunuchs, who stood holding it above his head. All were looking upon the motions of the aga while slipping back the bolts, and heard not the footsteps of the page as he approached them. In his hand he held a long rod, which he swung around swiftly and struck the lamp from the eunuch's hand.

All was now darkness, and after their surprise had abated, two of their number went up the long flights of steps again to procure other lights. A long time elapsed, in which the eunuchs huddled together over their prisoner, in earnest conversation. While D'Arville lay on the cold stone, hardly knowing what next to expect, a voice whispered close to his ear :

'Brave knight, those who have caused you to be brought hither, will soon restore you to liberty. Fear not, but believe that happier days are in store for you. Your vow shall be accomplished, your lady love shall be won, and your name be on the tongues of thousands. The rose which thou wearest is the symbol of thy invincible friends, and one of their chosen brothers will never be suffered to perish unnoticed. Remember, perseverance and secrecy, and you shall ere long find Azilla, and win Azalie.'

The whisper ceased, and the gloom of the dreary dungeons seemed lit up with bright beams of joyous hope, and while reviewing the occurrences of the evening no feeling of regret crossed his mind. Had he

been free to have performed his part over again, he would not have hesitated an instant to do so.

Soon a faint light cast the shadows of the massive pillars along the floor, and the two eunuchs were seen approaching, bearing a lamp in each hand, evidently determined not be left in the dark again. The whole party looked around to discover the cause of the interruption which they had experienced a few moments before, but in vain, and returning to their prisoner they raised him, and thrust him into the dungeon. The door was closed and D'Arville left to darkness and his own reflections.

The aga of eunuchs had hardly closed the door, when something struck him and dropped down with a dull sound. Looking downward, he perceived, upon the ground, to his horror, a fleshless skull. The whole affrighted group, with quick steps, moved toward the foot of the stairs, and just as they were about to ascend, three or four more of the strange missiles came flying about their ears, while a dismal cry echoed among the vaults.

This was more than they could bear, for though they would have boldly faced a human foe, and perished rather than surrender, yet when these tokens of a supernatural foe came upon them, they dropped whatever was in their hands, and with yells and cries of terror, scrambled up the steps as rapidly as possible, falling over each other repeatedly in their affright, and stopped not till they found themselves safe in the apartments of the princess Azalie.

Had they but stopped a moment, in their upward course, they would have heard a merry laugh following them, as the page chuckled over the success of his stratagem.

CHAPTER XVI.

*The knight released. A discovery. The dying emir.
Poison. The assassins detected. The confession.
Hafed's villany. 'Selim and an empire.*

AT midnight the anxious Selim, who sat in his own apartment, heard a knock at his door, which a servitor opened, and there appeared the three physicians who attended his father, the aged emir. They made their obeisances, and stood respectfully awaiting the sound of his voice.

'I doubt not, men of wisdom, you have come from my reverend father. You said that this hour the fever would be fully developed, and you would be enabled to decide on the true nature of the case. Speak then, and keep nothing from me through fear of wounding my feelings.'

'Prince of ten thousand warriors, we have come hither to relieve your mind of suspense; we cannot, however, do more than bid you hope. The nature of his malady sets at defiance all our skill in physic, and we know now, no more than at dawn, what causes his

ness. Much of the fever hath left him, but he is still incoherent, and seemeth to be sinking rapidly.'

'Is it so, then? and is our tribe to lose its great leader, at this perilous moment, when all is in commotion; when my brother hath the martial sons of Turcomania far away, and is perhaps in open rebellion? No, no, must not be, for without him who will keep the horrors of civil war from our midst? Who will calm the storm when my brother shall return and sweep me and mine from the land? O, if you would win Selim's unyielding gratitude, if you would merit the blessings of paradise, and the smiles of angelic beings, save him, save him, and you will have the thanks of millions.'

'Noble Selim, we will do our best. We will never leave his side, by night or day, till he is restored to health, and if we fail, let our lives be forfeit. A thousand blessings rest upon your head, and may happiness and prosperity rest upon your filial piety, and attend your future course. Shall we retire, hope of Ben Stam's tribe?'

'Go,' replied Selim, 'and should any change occur, let me know at once. Success attend your efforts, and increasing felicity be your portion.'

With fitting reverence the men of science withdrew, and the prince was again left alone, but not long, for a few minutes after a page entered, the same, who had led the knight such a journey before he reached the room of the princess Azalie, and with a smile took the seat to which Selim pointed him.

'Everything has succeeded, my lord, and the chevalier is in safe quarters, in the dungeon. The eunuchs did not find it a very pleasant task to seize him, for he laid half of them senseless, and by the beard of Mahom-

et, I could hardly help laughing aloud, and disclosing the place of my concealment. I was safe behind the hanging of the movable wall, and when they took him down the secret stairs I followed, and so frightened them, that they did not half stop to fasten the cell, but scampered up stairs as fast as possible.'

'But what said my sister to his suit?' inquired the prince.

'She told him that when he had performed the vow which brought him hither, he might hope to win her,' replied the page.

'And did he tell her the whole story of the maniac?'

'Yes, my prince, and when he first mentioned it she seemed somewhat jealous, but on hearing the conclusion of the tale, she was filled with admiration of his disinterested gallantry, and desired him to persevere.'

'Then all goes right,' said the prince, 'and my plans in respect to him will soon be brought to a successful termination. Go now, and keep a good watch.'

The prince soon retired to rest, and slept calmly till dawn. After seeing his father, who was asleep, but failing fast, he sought Lord Cretolius, whom he found in great anxiety respecting the prince Arnil, the latter not having been seen since the previous evening. The prince seemed much surprised at this, as if he knew nothing of it, and caused active inquiries to be made in all parts of the palace. For a long time they met with no success, till at last the aga of the eunuchs appeared, and stated that he had arrested such a person for intruding into the apartment of the princess Azalie.

The prince ordered the aga to bring the prince Arnil to his presence. This having been done, the astonished chief of eunuchs was ordered to retire, and Selim held out his hand to D'Arville, saying :

‘And so, my gallant prince, you would seek the hand of my sister? I do not blame you, for she is beautiful as the stars, and worthy of thy love. But you must beware how you enter her apartments, lest the guards, not knowing the friendship I have for you, shall cut you to pieces.’

The knight knew not what to say at this unexpected speech, and was surprised at the generosity displayed by the prince, where he had expected nothing but indignation and death.

‘Ha!’ continued Selim, advancing to the knight, and pulling aside his silken doublet, ‘what is here? If you wear disguises, you should take care not to let what is beneath be seen. This is not Turcoman armor. By the beard of Mahomet, who art thou, that wearest the black armor of a foe, and comest into our presence in the guise of a spy, making professions of friendship to deceive me? Guards, ho!’

A dozen of the armed attendants entered, and in obedience to the prince’s order tore off the disguise of D’Arville, and left him standing in his armor in the middle of the room. The red flush of indignation crossed his features, but he knew it was useless to make the least resistance, and with his eyes fixed firmly on those of the prince, awaited his movements or words.

‘Now I think, as Allah is my guide, that I have seen that face before. Ha, that symbol on the shoulder—is it the Knight of the Silver Cross? Is it he who saved

my fair sister in the halls at Palmyra? Is it he who bearded my brother Hafed in the streets of palms? Welcome, welcome, brave knight, welcome to the home of Selim. Here is my hand, and with it take my friendship, and renewed assurances of my gratitude and esteem.'

'Noble-hearted prince, I am pleased with your generosity, and as St. John is my patron, if you will place confidence in me you will find it not misplaced, and should you need my services in the field, you will know that my arm has not lost its strength since I smote the imperious Lion of Turkestan from his horse. Should he bring his armies back to destroy you, count on my assistance, and that of my troop, who are true knights as ever donned armor, or struck a blow for St. John and victory, and in the contest I will seek Hafed in the van of the fight, and not leave him till one or the other of us shall have perished.'

As D'Arville ceased, the thoughtful expression of the prince's face gave place to a smile, as he said:

'You desire me to place confidence in you. I will do so, but first I would have you repose in me your secrets? I would have you tell me why you came hither, and wherefore you assumed that disguise, and dared such a dangerous adventure? Come, we will step into the balcony, and there I can hear your story.'

The knight gladly accepted the invitation, and followed the prince through the open window, the blinds of which they shut behind them. Lord Cretolins was alone for half an hour, at the end of which time the two returned, and found a messenger awaiting them, who, when he saw the prince, spoke:

'May you live a thousand years, noble Selim. The men of wisdom have sent me hither to tell you that your father, the emir, whom Allah preserve, has recovered his reason, and is now in a condition to see you. He earnestly desires your presence.'

'Lead me to him. Come, Lord Cretolius, and Sir Percy, will you not accompany me?'

The slave led the way, and the two guests, with Selim, followed in his footsteps. In the room of the emir were two of the physicians, who stood aside to let the prince pass. The latter, advancing to the bedside of his father, took his hand, but spoke not, for his heart was full at the pitiable state in which he found his beloved parent.

'My noble son, and you, my guests, I rejoice that I am permitted again to look upon you. My brave Selim, I have sent for you, for I feel that my days are numbered, for the nature of my disease is unknown, and my mind tells me that ere the sun shall have thrice sped his daily course, I will be no more on earth, and my soul, I hope, will seek the happy regions of bliss, and rest from care in the paradise of the faithful.'

'Nay, weep not, my gallant son, weep not, for you have been dutiful to me, and heaven will reward you. When I am gone let peace reign between you and Hafed, and disturb not the prosperity of my realms by discord. But why hath Arnil assumed that dark armor of our foemen?'

'My father, I will tell you,' replied Selim, 'when we are alone, for I would not show my weakness to others.'

'Tis no disgrace, Selim, but an honor, for your tears are dictated by your filial love. Nevertheless, noble

sirs, will you withdraw to the ante-room for a moment? When we have finished our conversation we will recall you.'

Both retired, and the prince was left alone with his father, for the space of forty minutes, at the end of which time they were re-admitted. The emir lay with closed eyes, and the prince Selim stood at the foot of the couch, with folded arms, while in his eyes a strange expression attracted the attention of D'Arville. The gaze of the prince was fastened upon the knight, and once the latter imagined he detected a slight smile lurking in the corners of his mouth.

So confounded was he by the singular look with which Selim regarded him, that he remained in one spot, in vain attempting to read his thoughts, till the prince spoke :

'My father hath been telling of matters new to me; of a fact which has filled me with surprise, and which greatly concerns you and the object of your search.'

'Is it so!' exclaimed the knight; 'has he told you who carried off the Lady Azilla Marontius and her daughter, and do you know where they now are? If you will let me know, if you will aid me in fulfilling my vow, as you promised, you cannot ask me aught that I will not grant.'

'I take you at your word,' replied Selim. 'Rest content, and be assured that ere three weeks have passed you shall see them; but then I shall claim the promise you first made to me, and insist on its fulfilment. Well, reverend man, wherefore come you in such haste?'

The latter sentence was addressed to one of the physicians, who now entered quickly, and scarcely

stopping to salute the prince, stammered forth in broken sentences, as fast as his exhausted breath would allow :

‘My prince, the servitor who sat up last night with your father, has been taken suddenly ill, in the same manner, and is nearly insensible. He was asked what he had been eating, and said that since last evening he had tasted nothing but a drop of water, which he sipped from a cup he found on the emir’s table.’

‘What ?’ exclaimed the prince, ‘and do you mean to say that he has the same symptoms, that he is affected in the same manner as my father ?’

‘It is even so, my prince, the feverish sleep he is now in is the same,’ replied the physician.

‘Then, by the beard of Mahomet, my father has been poisoned ! Father, you have heard ! Which of these cups did you drink from last night, as is your custom ?’

‘Allah be praised for this discovery, for I feared that some new disease had come upon our tribe to thin its warriors off. The cup is the silver one which stands upon the edge of the board. That is it.’

The prince raised the designated vessel, and after examining it attentively, exclaimed, as he passed it to the physician :

‘By the tomb of the prophet, it is even so, for here is a fine white powder resting on the surface ! What think you of it, my sage advisers, has there not been foul work here ? Look at it and say. If my suspicions are correct, may Allah help me to discover the demons, and rend them limb from limb ! By the beard of Mahomet, their bodies shall bleach above

the city gate, and their bones whiten in the breeze!’

‘Prince Selim, there is death in this cup!’ said the physician. ‘This powder, if I mistake not, is a poison, and if so, I have a phial in my room to test it. Here, slave,’ continued he, opening the door and speaking to one without, ‘hasten to my apartment in my mansion, and bring hither the largest black cup from my case of brass. Quick, or your head will be the answer for your tardiness.’

The physician sat down and looked into the cup as if in a study. Prince Selim, with anxious look, paced quickly hither and thither across the apartment, evidently struggling to master his emotions, while the knight seemed wrapt in a sort of surprised meditation as if something had crossed his mind of a startling nature. At last the door opened, and a slave appearing, handed a little phial to the physician.

The latter placed the cup on a stand, and while he present eagerly watched his movements, he poured a few drops of the dark-colored liquid from the phial into it. A bubbling noise ensued, and the water in the drinking vessel frothed and foamed up, and at last burst in snowy effervescence over the edge, and down the stand.

‘It is poison,’ cried the wise man, ‘and of such a nature that he who swallows a grain or two is doomed to a slow but sure destruction. Three days, as the emir said, limits the duration of life. The fever has passed off; after the fever a few hours of respite intervene, followed by the most painful spasms and death. There is no remedy for it, no help for our emir, and he must—’

Choking sobs interrupted the old man's utterance, and he bowed his aged head upon the couch of his master, and giving way to his feelings, wept like an infant.

'O, Allah!' said Selim, 'and is it so? Must we lose the great head of our house? Must my beloved father perish? Would, would that I could know what demon has done this, would that I could know—'

'I have it, St. John, I have it!' cried D'Arville, starting to his feet, with flashing eyes, 'I know who have done it, as St. John is my guide, I do; and if you will but be led by me, I will bring the wretches to punishment!'

'Who is it, then, if thou knowest? Tell me quickly, that I may sacrifice them to my vengeance, and Allah will bless you, noble knight,' cried Selim.

'I do not know, but by the glory of my knighthood, I have my suspicions, and if you will but do as I direct, I shall try to prove them,' answered D'Arville.

'Quick, then, I will do so; what would you?'

'Where are the emirs of your race? Are they here?'

'Three have gone with Hafed to destroy the city in the desert, but the other seven are now in Iconium.'

'Go then, send your swiftest messengers, and bring them hither to this room. How long ere this can be accomplished?'

'Noble knight, their palaces are near at hand, and a few minutes will suffice to accomplish your desires,' answered Selim. 'I will leave you here, and return with them ere long, and bring with me other chiefs.'

'And let a guard attend, I pray, and with them the

aga of eunuchs,' responded the knight, as Selim left the room.

Scarcely ten minutes elapsed ere the tramp of armed men was heard without. As the sound ceased the prince Selim entered, accompanied by seven emirs and a score of chieftains, in the most magnificent dresses. Having paid their respects to the aged emir, and greeted him with sympathizing words, they gathered around his bed in silent and respectful group, awaiting what should come next.

Opening the door, D'Arville spoke to the aga: 'Go thou to the cell of the princes Ali and Mustapha, bind them hand and foot, bandage their eyes, and bring them hither, but let them know nought of what has happened. Whisper but a word to them, and your head shall answer for it.'

The aga disappeared and ere long returned, leading a band of eunuchs, who bore their prisoners on their shoulders, and in obedience to the knight's orders sat them on a cushion, some distance from the foot of the emir's couch, with their faces towards it.

'Do you still deny that you entered the apartment of the princess Azalie?' inquired the knight of the blind-folded prisoners.

'We do,' replied Ali, 'we are not guilty of that act.'

'Where then were you, or what business had you in the upper floor of the palace?'

We said before that we went thither to seek our master, the emir, but that we never were nigh the princess's door. Did the eunuchs find us in the northern wing, in which is the harem, or did they find us in the

western wing, near our master's door?" replied Mustapha.

'If you went to see your master, why did you not fulfil your intentions?' asked the knight.

'Because when we slightly opened the door, the slaves were asleep in the ante-room, and knowing from this that the emir had retired to rest, we concluded not to disturb him. We wished to see him on secret business.'

'And of what secret business did you whisper together in the corridor of the eastern wing, ere you sought his chamber? What said you when you stopped before the black door of the eastern tower, which opens into that corridor?' questioned the knight.

The two prisoners held their peace for a moment, but Ali at last asked, hesitatingly:

'Who saw us in the eastern corridor? We were not either in that or the eastern wing that night.'

'Knaves, you are caught with a lie on your tongue. Slaves,' shouted Selim, 'if you were not in the eastern corridor, by what stairs did you ascend to this floor? Answer that, dogs of Mahoun!'

'We came up by the other stairs,' responded Ali, boldly.

'Slave, thou liest; no other staircase leads hither, except that which is in the harem, in the northern wing; now is thy guilt clear as daylight, for either thou liest in saying thou didst not pass through the eastern corridor, or else thou camest hither by the harem stairs!' cried Selim.

'*Hither!*' said Mustapha, 'what meanest thou? Where are we, I pray? Can we be in—in—'

‘Remove the bandage from their eyes, and keep silent, one and all,’ said D’Arville to the chiefs.

The orders of the knight were obeyed, and the two astonished prisoners gazed in silence upon the prostrate emir, on the guards, on the frowning faces of the emirs and chiefs, upon the angry eye and terrific look of the aroused Selim, and on the stern, determined countenance of D’Arville. Over the face of Ali came an expression of ferocious daring, and his lips were compressed in proud defiance, but Mustapha exhibited every sign of terror. The knight looked searchingly from one to the other, and then ordered the guards to remove Ali from the room. When this was done, he thus addressed Mustapha :

‘Slave, thou art near to death. Confess thy crimes, and thou shalt live. It is the only chance, and if thou dost not seize the opportunity while it presents itself, thy soul will soon be raving in the regions of despair, doomed forever to the pangs that await the accursed.’

‘What wouldst thou have me say ? I did not poison him.’

‘Ha !’ cried Selim, ‘wretch, thy doom is sealed !’

‘Nay, noble prince, thou wilt know no more, if thou wilt not be guided by me in all things. This man shall live, I say, but those who incited him on shall die.’

‘Be it as you say, but give me vengeance,’ responded Selim.

‘I will aid you in punishing the guilty,’ replied D’Arville. ‘Now, wretch, I give thee thy choice—hearest thou, Mustapha, life or death is thine. Confess, and thou shalt be restored to liberty, and money given

thee to seek a distant land; deny thy guilt, and thou perishest.'

'Ask me aught thou wilt and I will answer,' replied the terrified Mustapha, 'anything but death.'

'Well, then, what stairs did you ascend to reach this floor?'

'I came up the stairs of the eastern corridor.'

'Go on and relate all that happened there,' said D'Arville.

'At the back door I stopped and refused to go any farther, but Ali reasoned with me, and threatened me, till at last I consented to proceed. When we came to the door of this apartment, Ali opened it and softly entered the ante-room, upon the floor of which lay the guards, wrapped in a profound slumber. Their evening draught had been drugged by some of the creatures of Ali; and shutting the door, I followed him lightly over the prostrate forms of the slaves to the bedside of the emir. He breathed easy, and slept as gently as a babe. So light were his respirations, that one would hardly have thought him asleep.

'As I looked upon the snowy hair which fell around his noble brow, and gazed upon his venerable face, my heart smote me, and I felt a faintness come over me. The cup from which the emir drinks when he wakes at night was beside me; the little box of powder was in my hand, but my limbs refused their office, and I became almost powerless. In vain Ali pushed my arm, or angrily whispered to me to perform my part; in vain he threatened me with vengeance if I moved not; at last, in his impatience, he snatched the poison from my nerveless grasp, and threw the powder into the cup.

‘This action gave me strength ; and hurriedly leaving the bedside, I made my way back to the door, and in a minute more Ali and myself stood in the darkness of the entry. At that moment a noise echoed along the corridor, and the flaming of torches and hurrying forms coming towards us, caused Ali and myself to seek to escape by the western window, but ere we could do so, we were taken prisoners by the eunuchs, and were happy to find that our true purpose was not suspected. This made our confinement seem light to us in the dark dungeon into which we were thrown.’

As Mustapha concluded, glittering scimitars were unsheathed and several of the chiefs and emirs sprang forward to despatch him, but D’Arville, drawing his own weapon, placed himself in front of the prisoner, saying :

‘I have promised him life if he confessed ; and he shall have it, or, as St. John is my patron, I will perish with him.’

The indignant Moslem, who had often glanced with suspicious eyes upon the dark armor of D’Arville, and the glittering cross on his shoulder, would have instantly immolated him, at this attempt to defend the vile Mustapha, had not prince Selim sprang to his side, and varded off several of the blows, with his own scimitar, saying :

‘Cease ! this is he who saved the princess Azalie from death ; this is the gallant knight who rescued the flower of our tribe from the falling globe in the hall of Palmyra. Fall back, for he shall have his wish in this respect.’

In an instant the group of chiefs sheathed their blades, and pressed forward to salute the deliverer of their

charming princess, with hand and voice, and for a time the knight was compelled to forego the examination of his prisoner, while the emirs greeted him with blessings and exclamations of 'Hail to D'Arville, the knight of the Silver Cross!' At last, order was restored, and he said:

'Shall I continue my questions? am I to have the disposal of this prisoner, and do as I please with him?'

A universal token of assent from all present was his answer.

'Mustapha, what reward were you to have for the performance of the vile deed you have confessed?'

'Two sacks of gold, one of which Ali promised me, to assist him, was to be our reward. One sack he now hath concealed in his own house; the other was to be his when the deed was finished,' answered Mustapha.

'And from whom was this gold to come?' asked D'Arville.

'From Hafed, the Lion of Turkestan!'

'From Hafed!' 'Hafed a parricide!' 'From the prince of Ben Istam.' 'Can this be true?'

Such were the exclamations poured forth by the astonished chiefs, as the aged emir raised himself in bed, with horror in his countenance. D'Arville motioned to the aga, and Ali was brought before him.

'Ali, your guilt is known; concealment is now in vain; I have but one question to ask of you, and no more. Who hired you to poison the emir?'

'Ah! do you know it? Has yon poor coward told you all? Would that I had my hands free, his head should roll upon the ground,' cried Ali.

‘Your own will, very soon,’ answered D’Arville; ‘who, I ask you, incited you to this deed?’

‘I will not tell—but—yes, I will, for he has tempted me to my destruction, and he shall perish with me. It was Hafed, the warlike chieftain of Ben Istam. It was he who urged me to slay his father, that he might reign alone; for he meant, that when he took Palmyra, should he find Selim, to send his soul to the regions of death.’

A sign from D’Arville, and the flashing scimitar of the aga of eunuchs glanced the air; the gory head of the once beautiful Ali dropped upon the couch of him whom he had poisoned.

* * * * *

The emir was dying. His head was supported by pillows, and his glazing eye looked fearfully around the grim circle of the Moslem, who surrounded his couch. Upon the counterpane thirty glittering blades were held, and at the spot where their points met, the wan hand of the dying warrior rested. Thirty emirs and chieftains, in whose grasp the hilts were clasped, gazed with tearful eyes, yet determined expression, upon the pale countenance of Ben Istam’s sinking lord.

‘Chieftains of a mighty race, sons of the Seljukide conquerors, listen to my words. Swear, by the beard of the prophet, by your hopes of paradise, by the glories of Turcomania’s warlike children, to avenge my death, and pursue the traitorous Hafed to destruction, to give his dust to the winds, and his bones to the jackal of the mountains. Swear, that he shall never reign in these halls, that his foot shall never press these corridors, or his presence pollute my hall of judgment.’

‘We swear, by the beard of the prophet,’ was the solemn response.

‘Selim, my gallant son, to thee, in the presence of these warlike emirs, whom I call on to witness this act, the last act of my life, to thee give I my realm, my power, and the command of Ben Istam’s all-conquering warriors. Thou shalt reign alone, thou shalt lead the eight great tribes of the Turcoman race to avenge my death; and when the villain Hafed shall have perished, thou shalt bring back thy armies, and with hundreds of thousands of gallant Seljukides sweep over the country of the Byzantines, and punish their crimes; thou shalt be an instrument in the hands of Allah to chastise their enormities, and thy descendants shall reign for ages over a mighty empire. Chieftains, will you aid him in this, will you own him as your leader, and follow him, first to revenge, and then to fame, conquest, and dominion?’

‘We will, we will, by the beard of Mahomet.’

‘Then shout with me the war-cry of the new empire, —“Selim and an empire—death to the Greek—dominion to the dauntless sons of Ben Istam!”’

Wildly the chieftains shouted the war-cry, and with their voices mingled those of D’Arville and Cretolius. Thirty blades flashed brightly in the air, and clashed together again and again in token of response, and amid the fierce exclamations of the emirs, and their ardent vows, a smile of satisfaction crossed the features of the aged emir, as he fell back on his pillow.

‘In an instant every sound ceased, and all stood motionless. A few moments more, Selim placed his hand on the heart, but the bosom heaved not, and the fountain of life had ceased its pulsations; for the descendant of the great Genghis Khan lay cold in the sleep of death, and his lordly soul had winged its way to eternity.

CHAPTER XVII.

*Morden's success. The Moslem. A truce. An attack.
The siege. Marontius's bravery. Death of King
Ischora. Selim's array. Victory.*

THE first faint light of dawn rose over Palmyra, and showed a fearful sight; citizens arrayed against citizens, brother against brother, friend against friend. The dread horrors of civil war reigned in fearfulness, and it mattered not who should be the victors; terrible scenes of massacre would attend the completion of the unnatural contest, and the successful party, in self-defence, would be compelled to slaughter hundreds of their opponents, and bring to execution many of the greatest senators and the most gallant knights of the realm.

The sun rose brightly, but as yet the numerous troops of the king had not left the shelter of the castle garrison, and till they did so, it was not possible for Everard to attack them. The division of Lord Morden was drawn up in battle-array, in front of the castle gate, but at a safe distance, that they might be out of reach of the darts and missiles of the royal troops. This was a wise

provision on the part of Everard, as there was but a single gate opening from the castle, and that rather narrow.

Not long after, however, the remnant of the imperial legion issued forth, followed by a chosen band of footmen, and when about two thousand men had passed the gate, Lord Morden gave the signal to advance, which they did with impetuosity, and by the mere force of their overwhelming numbers threw the royalists into confusion, and slaughtered them without mercy. In vain they pressed back in hopes of re-entering the narrow gateway, for the throng fairly blocked it up, not only preventing the entrance of the discomfited band, without, but rendering it impossible for the rest to come out to their assistance.

In the confusion of the moment, it became an easy task for Lord Morden to destroy or take prisoners all who had at first deployed from the arched way, and retire with but small loss, before the imperialists within recovered sufficiently to shower their missiles from the battlements. The rest of the Cretolian army, witnessing the gallant exploit, issued forth with loud shouts of triumph, and ere long were drawn up in the field intervening between the palace and the castle, and sent demands to the king to come out and meet them in open fight, promising not to molest them till they were ready for battle.

By desertions, and the loss they had just experienced, the royalists were now inferior in number to the Cretolians, by at least a thousand men, and therefore Everard was justified in the bold stand he had taken. For a long time the king would not move, but at last a challenge more than ordinarily insulting roused his

anger, and in a transport of fury he gave orders to his chiefs to accept the challenge. In another hour his troops had left the security of the castle, and took up their position facing the Cretolians. All was ready, and at last the signal being given, both parties advanced toward each other.

At this moment of peril, messengers on swift steeds, with white streamers, dashed in between the opposing armies, just as the weapons were nearly crossed, seemingly careless of themselves in their anxiety for the general safety :

‘Cease ! cease ! the Moslem, the Moslem, are upon us !’

In an instant, every foot was stayed, every angry voice was hushed, and then, in place of the din of war which would have arisen, forty thousand tongues shouted :

‘The Moslem !’ ‘Peace, brethren, peace !’ ‘To the walls, to the walls !’ ‘Death to the Moslem !’

Yet none left the ranks, none presumed to stir without orders, and while the chiefs and captains of either party gathered around their great leaders, the soldiery eagerly questioned the messengers, and spread the tidings amid their comrades. From the suite of the monarch soon advanced a herald :

‘Baron Cretolius, and you, ye lords and barons, who have taken up his cause, listen to the words of the king, who—’

‘Come not to us with a kingly summons,’ exclaimed Everard, ‘for we own him not as our leader, but go back and tell him that unless he leaves the castle garrison as it is, to our possession, we will die where we are, rather than fight the Turcoman ; for there is honor

in our cause, and we have sworn to perish rather than give up our resolution of rescuing the Lady Ida.'

The herald returned to his master, and a hurried consultation was carried on among those surrounding the monarch, at the conclusion of which, the herald again approached Everard :

'The king, to preserve peace, and ensure the repulse of the coming invaders, gives thee all thou askest, and would implore thee to take upon thyself and followers the defence of the eastern and western walls.'

'What,' replied Lord Morden, 'would he divide us, that when all is over, and the Moslem driven back, he may with his whole force fall upon one of the divisions of our army, and annihilate it? Would he give us the defence of the two weakest sides of the wall, that we may be compelled to withstand the brunt of the battle, and become so much weakened that we shall fall an easy prey to his party when the siege is raised? Go, tell the wretch that we will defend the western and northern walls, or if not, we will perish here. If he accedes to our proposition, we will know it by seeing his forces filing off to the eastern and southern walls.'

Again the herald approached the royalist chieftain, and when the king heard the message of Lord Morden, in a transport of fury he gave orders to charge the Cretolians; but the circle of lords and barons around him refused to obey this suicidal mandate, which would have been the means of involving the city in inevitable ruin, and in a few minutes prevailed on the monarch to accept Lord Morden's proposition. One half of his army soon took up their line of march to the wall facing the desert, and the other, passing through a by-street, went southward.

An hour after, Everard and Lord Sicinius stood upon a turret of the northern wall, and gazed thence toward the north-east. There, far over the desert, they saw the gleam of arms, and the dark masses of countless warriors. Nearer and nearer they came, and before noon forty thousand of the sons of Turcomania pitched their camp about the northern and eastern sides of the beautiful city of the Syrian desert, and the black banner of the prophet waved before the eyes of king Iscora, while here and there beautiful streamers waved above the pavilions of emirs and chieftains.

‘And are these all who have come to conquer us?’ asked Everard. ‘Methinks, that were our host before their camp now, but little time would elapse ere those streamers and that black banner would be rent to fragments, and the pride of those plunder-seeking knaves be humbled in the dust.’

‘Truly,’ replied Lord Sicinius, ‘their numbers are no more than our own, and had we but those gallant Palmyrenes who have fallen since yester noon, we might sally out and attack them with a certainty of success.’

‘But where,’ asked Everard, ‘are the red robed sons of Ben Istam’s tribe? Where are the followers of the Lion of Turkestan? Can it be that this is some other foe come upon us?’

‘Nay, I think not, for ere you joined me in this tower, I thought I saw a party of warriors in dresses of red, so distant they seemed like a mere speck, leave the main body, and gallop across the plain toward the mountains to the north here, among which they disappeared. This leads me to imagine that we see not yet all our assailants.’

‘You are right, Lord Sicinius, you are right, for, look here to the western hills.’

The noble looked (for, from their elevated position on the watch-tower of a gate, they could gaze over the whole city), he looked, and just appearing over the brow of the hill, the red dresses of a body of guardsmen came in sight, and behind them marched thousands of dark forms. Soon all among the tombs they were scattered hither and thither, thirty thousand Seljukides, in the panoply of war, and all the western hills thronged with them.

* * * * *

At the ruined tomb of king Icarus, a scene was enacted startling in its character. On the altar stood the giant, form of the maniac Marontius, and as he gazed around with flashing eye, and looked far over the city to the desert beyond, he marked the folds of the Moslem banner three miles away, and in his madness laughed aloud as he thought of smiting down the guards and tearing from them the sacred standard.

No skin of wild beast now covered his gigantic limbs, but in its place he wore massive armor of excessive weight, the armor which years before had defended his body from the scimitars of the Saracen foe, armor which no man but himself could even lift. No crevice appeared in it save the slits in the visor of the helmet, through which he gazed, and on its newly polished surface were spots of rust eaten into the firm metal. From his heavy helmet rose a plume of red, and this, with his already gigantic height, made him seem some impersonation of one of the fabled heroes of antiquity—men whose like hath never been looked upon again.

Adown the roads bounded Moslem horsemen, amid the tombs gathered Moslem footmen, and soon around the altar a wondering band looked with curious eyes upon what they imagined a gigantic statue. The tall figure moved not, no sound issued from the maniac's closed lips, no sign of life appeared, though he knew the foe were there, till at last when hundreds of his enemies stood near, he sprang suddenly among the astounded throng, and waving his massive weapon around him, swept them from existence by twos and threes with his terrific blows.

'Dogs, slaves, for my lost ones. Here have I met your accursed race, once before. Marontius, to the combat. Death, death, to one, to all, destruction to your unbelieving hordes. Come on, come, and I will meet you, I will show you what one Palmyrene can do. Strike on, my armor is proof, and ye cannot reach me with the edge. Ha! have I raised a pile of your carcases, have I built with my blade a bleeding monument to Azilla? Azilla, victory, Palmyra, ha! ha!'

In vain the Moslem gathered around the ferocious Marontius, with desperate courage; their strokes fell harmlessly on his coat of steel, and not till scores of their numbers had fallen did they give back to allow the charge of a troop of horse, who by their sudden rush expected to overthrow the maniac. The foremost rider met his fate and perished by the same stroke that shattered the back of his noble steed, but the charge was successful, and the heavy armed maniac lay prostrate beneath the hoofs. The troop passed over him, but he was unharmed, and when the footmen threw themselves upon his body to pinion him, he threw them violently aside bruised and bleeding, and

springing to his feet rushed down amid the tombs, destroying all who stood in his path. His speed outstripped that of his pursuers, who were not used to riding among the ruins, and ere long he reached the city gate, and soon after, mounting the ramparts, sought the adherents of the house of Artanius, who were ranged on the northern wall beside those of Cretolius.

By night the Moslem had formed their camp on the plain around the city, and their white tents dotted the mountains. At dusk, a herald came to the western gate and demanded the surrender of the city in the name of Hafed the Lion of Turkestan, but the darts that whistled around his head, soon caused him to make precipitate retreat. The hours of darkness were passed in security by the besieged Palmyrenes; but in the dusk of the morning Lord Sicinius stood beside the couch of Everard, and woke him from his sleep, with a slight pressure of his hand.

‘Arouse, from thy slumber, Baron Cretolius, arouse! for there is a sound of trampling feet upon the sand, and if I judge aright, the foe are coming to attack us from the northward. Quick, with me to the ramparts.’

Everard was instantly on his feet, and as the house where he was quartered for the night was near the wall, he was soon treading the lofty parapet, and plainly heard the tramp Sicinius had spoken of coming toward his position, though the darkness was such that nought could be seen. Along the line of works the retainers of four lordly houses stood in firm phalanx, awaiting the impetuous onset of the coming Moslem, though many hearts were filled with anxiety when they thought upon their critical situation.

‘Ha! my Lord Sicinius, the sound has ceased.

What meaneth this? Listen attentively, and keep silence, my gallants.'

They strained every nerve to catch the echo again, but it was no longer apparent; but while they listened, the sound of conflict suddenly burst upon their hearing from the eastward where the royalists held the wall, and the war-cries of 'Hafed and conquest,' told that the Lion of Turkestan was leading his Turcoman followers to the attack. But not long were the defenders of the northern wall left in idleness, for the tramp in front again commenced, and soon dark masses appeared amid the twilight, and crossing the ditches, with their shouts of 'Allah-il-allah,' and 'Death to the assassins of Selim,' placed their ladders against the works, and sought to ascend.

'Throw over the ladders,' shouted Everard, 'place your poles beneath the top rungs and send them over. Ha! they have gained the first terrace, but be cool, be cool, and when their ladders touch the upper terrace, do your duty manfully. Cretolius and Palmyra. Heaven for the patriot-defenders!'

The wall was made in five terraces, one above the other, the breadth of each of which was hardly a yard, the top terrace being lined with battlements, while from the front projected spikes. Notwithstanding these obstructions, notwithstanding the shower of stones poured down upon their heads from above, notwithstanding that hundreds rolled senseless from the wall-side, the daring Moslem pressed continually upward, till at last their ladders rested against the upper terrace.

And now followed an appalling scene of destruction; for here and there the Palmyrenes waited till the

turbaned head of the foremost appeared at the top, and then sent the ladder with its living load crashing down upon the heads of those below, while the dying shrieks of mangled and bruised human beings startled the ear and pained the heart, as the Moslem perished in their agony.

On other parts of the wall the Turcoman soldiers gained a footing and poured in swarms over the parapet : and here the conflict was terrific ; here the ferocious game of war was played by master hands, and blood flowed in streams along the ramparts, or trickled down the sides of the mossy stone. But in the end, the desperate valor of the Moslem proved insufficient to conquer the resolute Palmyrenes, who fought for home and liberty, for the city of their birth ; and ere an hour passed, the foe retired with reduced numbers from the presence of the patriot defenders, and leaving all parts of the wall, fell back to their camp.

Joyfully did the Palmyrenes greet each other on their success in repulsing the foe, and before long a herald from the king approached Lord Sicinius and Cretolius, complimenting them upon their defence, and asking who of the senators on that side had fallen. The only loss in this respect was the death of the younger Baron Sicinius ; and the herald, after saying that but two nobles had fallen in the king's array, returned to his master. And now the ramparts thronged with maidens and youth bearing wine and fruit to their tired friends ; wives and daughters came to seek their husbands and fathers, anxious to know whether they had fallen, or were still alive to bless their sight ; and in place of the wild scene prevalent an hour before, happiness and pleasure reigned, and the

tired retainers were refreshing themselves after their desperate and deadly work.

Two days passed slowly away without another attack, and the warriors of Turcomania nursed their rage and disappointment, and their unavailing efforts to gain the wall filled them with a deep desire of vengeance on those who had slain so many of their comrades. The Lion of Turkestan was in a state of almost demoniac fury at his repulse from a city which he thought would have so easily fallen into his hands, and sent messengers in all directions to entice the wandering tribes of the desert to his standard by promises of reward.

The third evening saw forty thousand horsemen, collected from the tents of the Arab, from the banks of the Euphrates, and even from the land of the Saracen, swell the host of the prince, and now did he make active preparations for another assault. The Palmyrenes looked tremblingly upon the overwhelming hosts, gathered against them, and awaited with forebodings of evil the attack of the hundred thousand followers of Mahomet, who now threatened them with death.

The dawn of the fourth day saw the Moslem array advancing in four divisions upon the four walls of Palmyra; but this was a ruse, for but one was intended to make an attack, the other three merely being put in motion to divert the attention of the Palmyrenes.

The division which was intended to make an attack, consisted of fifty thousand chosen warriors, led by the prince Hafed himself. The latter had discovered that the king held possession of the eastern wall, and believing that if he could but take that portion of the city, and destroy those commanded by the monarch, all

further resistance would cease, he determined to attack it with an irresistible force, and take it at all hazards.

The signal was given, and they advanced to the front of the wall, their ladders were raised, and the daring Moslem soon stood upon the first terrace. Showers of stones, rocks, and bricks, were thrown upon their heads, like hail, and the darts rained upon them in clouds, as they made progress upwards. Ladder after ladder was overthrown, hundreds of mangled forms were piled at the foot of the wall, yet they pressed upward, and though a score of thousands had fallen, at last they crossed the parapet, and their hordes drove back the royalists in dismay.

Hafed appeared soon after, directly in front of the spot where the king fought desperately, and on seeing the monarch, sprang forward with a cry of defiance. Their blades crossed, and hand to hand they strove, but the exhausted Iscora, whose arm had struck down dozens of the foe, found himself unable to cope with the prince, fresh from his tent, and the falchion of the latter, with a glittering sweep, passed through the throat of the monarch, and he fell amid his followers a breathless corpse.

Hafed, stooping, picked up the coronet which had fallen from the helmet of the king, and placing it upon his own turban, looked on with an exulting smile, while his followers massacred the royal division in cold blood, drove them over the edge of the wall, and totally annihilated them.

At each corner of the wall was a massive fortress of almost impregnable strength, through which ran the passage and great stairs whereby the ascent or descent was generally made, there being no other way to

mount upon or leave the wall. The defenders of the two at each end of the eastern side, refused to surrender them, and thus Hafed found he had gained a very slight advantage. True, he could descend into the city, and massacre the women and children, but the soldiers of Palmyra occupied the other three walls, and should he lose as many men in taking each as in taking this one, his army would be nearly destroyed.

The sun had now arisen, and while Hafed stood meditating on what should be done next, his eye caught sight of a red mass far away toward the Euphrates, seeming like a vast body of armed men. In an instant it struck him that this array might be against him, and he found his suspicion confirmed, when a messenger mounted the wall, and whispered a few words in his ear.

Hafed descended at once, giving orders to his array to follow, and gathering the three other divisions, marshalled them in the plain, eighty thousand strong (for the rest had fallen in storming the wall), and soon the astonished Palmyrenes saw them marching over the desert. Before an hour elapsed they were four miles distant, and continuing their march. Everard gazed long and anxiously in the direction taken by them, and perceiving the approach of another army from the Euphrates, said :

‘ If that is not the army of prince Selim approaching to overthrow Hafed, if that is not the promised assistance, then I will forfeit my baronetcy. Do you see it, Lord Sicinius ?’

‘ I do, I do, and now let us away to assist them.’

* * * * *

The sons of Ben Istam were led by Selim, on the right; the emir Hassan, assisted by D'Arville, commanded the centre—and here the black armor of the knights was conspicuous; and another emir held authority over the left, where Lord Cretolius and his retainers, with De Montfort and his three hundred Britons, rode in the midst of the Turcomans. The prince had, in these three divisions, sixty thousand warriors.

The shock was terrible when the opposing armies met, and varied were the war-cries which rent the air. With the wild shout of 'Selim and vengeance!' the twenty thousand scarlet-robed sons of Ben Istam's tribe followed their dauntless prince, against the left of Hafed's army, and their impetuous course was marked with the slain. Soon along the whole fronts of the armies, steel crossed steel, blow followed blow, and hand to hand strove in fierce contest a hundred and forty thousand human beings, men of the same race; hatred flashed from dark eyes, and loudly rang the warlike cries, as bosom pressed against bosom in desperate conflict. It was a grand, though terrific scene, for there was man in his power; there, moving masses of men, swayed by the same impulses, flung themselves fearlessly upon each other's weapons, daring death to satiate the ambition of their leaders, and pouring out their life-blood freely in obedience to the will of the few.

In the centre the shock of Hafed's array broke most fiercely, and before him the emir Hassan gave ground. In vain D'Arville's war-cry, 'St. John and victory!' was heard above the din of battle, as his trusty weapon

did murderous execution, for with the rest his little band fell back, fighting like lions at bay, the foe in vain endeavoring to break the dark line presented by their forms. Still Hafed's warriors drove them along, and in another minute the centre would have been thrown into irretreivable disorder, had not the aged De Montfort rushed from the left wing to their rescue, followed by his three hundred chevaliers, who, as they dashed their weapons in the bosoms of Hafed's foremost men, cried:

'On, on, St. George, for merry England! De Montfort to the rescue! Ho! ho! for victory or death!'

'St. John and victory! On, my gallant troopers, on, strike for the silver cross once more,' cried D'Arville.

'Death to the parricide!' echoed the knights, while they pressed forward irresistibly, and 'death to the parricide!' resounded throughout the ranks of Selim's army, as the gallantry of D'Arville and De Montfort restored the fight. In the forefront of the battle they met again, Hafed the Lion of Turkestan, and the Knight of the Silver Cross, and to the baleful glance which shot from Hafed's eye, D'Arville replied:

'Have I not kept my promise truly? Did I not tell thee I would meet thee where the carnage was fiercest, where the dead lay thickest, and where the storm of battle broke most wildly? Did I not promise it? And, now, St. John to the rescue! when I have slain those who intervene, I will cross blades with thee, and see whose prowess is to be called greatest.'

'Come on, dog,' cried Hafed, 'I have much to avenge. Thy body will I give to the vulture, and the

vena of the south shall gnaw thy bones. That blow in the hall of Palmyra, that stroke in the street of palms, I have not forgotten. Come on, and by the beard of Mahomet, I will send thy soul to the shades of despair, and blast thy warlike fame. Take that, and that—'

'And that, thou parricidal wretch, thou poisoner of my parent;' repeated D'Arville, striking a fearful blow on Hafed's head, which broke the helmet, the pieces of which dropped to the ground.

'By the beard of Mahomet, dog of a Frank, you shall never conquer me. Down, slave, down, though my coronet is broken, my courage faileth not. That blow shall send thee to—Allah—ah—I—strike not—n—Ben Istam's—'

The sweeping blade of D'Arville had struck a second blow on Hafed's shoulder, the third went crashing through the skull of the prince, and the next instant the lion of Turkestan dropped from his steed a bleeding corpse.

'On, on, for St. John and victory! Hafed has fallen, and the silver cross victorious! On, on, and the battle is ours.'

Loud were the cries of exultation which followed his feat, and while Selim's gallant array pressed on the foe in every direction, the news of Hafed's death spread rapidly among his discomfited followers, and they insensibly gave ground, but still by their superior numbers held good their array.

Suddenly, the gleam of arms was seen in their rear, and thirty thousand Palmyrenes, led by Everard, Scinius, and Morden, burst upon their wearied ranks

like a thunder-storm, with cries of 'Cretolius to the charge!' Palmyra and Selim!' 'Death to the spoiler!' and soon the long blue plumes of the house of Cretolius were seen making way through the forces of Hafed. The army of the parricide gradually melted away, and his hired bands fled, and ere long, of all who had followed him from Turcomania, three-fourths slept in death, while above the shrieks and groans of the dying rose the exulting cry, 'Long live Selim Othman! Victory, victory!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

The rescue. The lady's story. Selim's suit. The senate chamber. The choice of a monarch. The funeral of king Iscora.

NEAR the walls of Palmyra lay Selim's army, and mingling with them in good will were the troops of Palmyra, while thousands of the women of the city issued forth from the gate, at the recommendation of the nobles, who wished to please the Turcoman warriors, and prevent any possibility of their seizing the place—the women issued forth with the choicest refreshments, which they bestowed liberally on those who they considered had rescued them from the horrible scenes inevitably consequent on the storming of a city.

Near the ruined tomb of king Icarus were gathered a large body of leaders, who, after examining the whole deserted camp of the defeated army, had come to a halt here to view the landscape which presented itself, and see whether any traces of the vanquished foe were to be discovered.

Selim the dauntless, Lieutenant Sebastian, Lord **Cretolius**, the Baron De Montfort, the emir Hassan and the emirs and chiefs of the Turcoman tribes, the nobles and senators of Palmyra, all these were there, dressed in their richest vestments. Their conversation turned on the absence of Everard and the Knight of the Silver Cross, who had reached the top of the hill some distance before them, with a few attendants, and instantly galloped down the opposite side. The troop of leaders, on arriving at the summit, saw the two with their followers a mile away, galloping rapidly down the side of the mountain, evidently in pursuit of a body of horsemen, in scarlet uniforms, on whom they were rapidly gaining, and the chiefs watched their course till a spur of the mountains hid them from view.

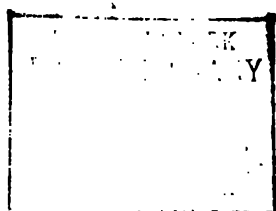
The fact was, that Everard and the knight, on arriving at the summit, had seen a single soldier in scarlet beside of a broken tomb, and while they halted to look at him, D'Arville exclaimed :

'St. John, help me, but there are others there, for I can just discover the tops of their turbans above the tomb. Let us ride forward, and see what the knaves mean by skulking there.'

At this movement the single horseman turned and fled, and from behind the tomb a dozen others followed him as rapidly as possible, merely stopping to glance at the knight's party.

'Now, by the banner of our order, Everard, they bear a lady with them. See you how they gather around the foremost rider in their course, as if to hide him and his fair burden from view? What say you, shall we track them?'

'I am ready, therefore lead on quickly, and give



PERILOUS SITUATION OF LADY IDA, AND HER RESCUE.



The Knight of the Silver Cross aiming a blow at the head of the murderous Moslem. — See page 255.

them a taste of our steel. O, heavens, it may be—it may—follow, my men, follow.’

‘Is it so, Everard? St. John to the rescue! Onward, my merry men, one and all, and an ounce of silver to him who first strikes one of the knaves from his horse,’ shouted the knight, putting spurs to his steed, and following, with his whole escort, the headlong course of Everard.’

For three miles they pressed in close pursuit, and in the fourth mile gained so rapidly on the chase, that some of the Moslems galloped off at right angles into the recesses of the mountains. These D’Arville cared not for, his eyes being on the lady, and ere long but two remained of the foe who kept the track, and these, finding they could not succeed in escaping while burdened with their prisoner, drew their scimitars to end her existence, but the lady, with a sudden and violent spring, slipped from the arms of him who held her upon the ground. One of the Moslem continued his flight, but the other, as soon as he could rein in his steed, turned with the desperate determination of overtaking her footsteps, ere she could meet the knight and his troop, toward whom she was making the best of her way.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

He reached her side, raised his scimitar, and with one fearful sweep—but no—for at that instant she tripped and fell, and the accident saved her life. The Moslem bent half over from his saddle to decapitate the prostrate girl, but ere the blow descended upon her snowy neck, the heavy sword of D’Arville, whose

powerful steed had distanced the others, smote him to the earth.

The lady fainted at this moment, the excitement being too strong for her, and Everard, just arriving, sprang from his horse to raise her. She had fallen on her face, and the countenance meeting his eyes, as he lifted her, he exclaimed :

‘O, what joy ! D’Arville, D’Arville, it is my sister, my own dear Ida. And she has had such a narrow escape from the Moslem scimitar, and perhaps from a worse fate. Heaven be praised for this. O, happiness ! dear Ida, awake, ’tis thy brother hath thee in his arms, thy own loved Everard, Ida, Ida.’

‘St. John and victory !’ cried the knight, joyfully. ‘I congratulate you, Everard, and wish you joy. Ha, ha, I could laugh with pleasure, Everard ; see, she revives.’

The eyes of the Lady Ida opened gradually, and when they rested on the face of her brother, a bright look filled them, the rich color came back into her pallid cheeks, and she murmured :

‘Dear Everard, save me from those Saracens, save me from the power of Hafed. Do not let them kill me.’

‘Nay, dear sister, you are safe. They have fled, and he who would have slain thee, is dead. Come, let me assist you to your feet, and we will return with you to Palmyra.’

‘To Palmyra, brother ; and is it not true, then, that Palmyra has fallen, that king Iscora is dead, and that the prince Hafed has slaughtered the people and burned their houses ?’

‘Nay, Palmyra stands more proudly than before.

The king is dead, but he deserved to die, for sending the robber Kasid and his band to carry you away, that he might destroy your fame and virtue. The prince Hafed had his skull cleft in twain by our gallant friend, D'Arville, and the generous Selim hath saved us,' said Everard.

'Selim, and where—I mean—who—where is the brave knight?'

'Here, lady, and right joyful to greet you at this moment of restoration to home and friends. Let me assist you, Everard, in placing her upon this steed.'

As the knight said this, himself and the baron placed the lady on a horse, which was led by a retainer, and the party set out upon their return, while Ida poured forth her grateful thanks to her noble deliverer.

The band arrived at the summit of the hill in another hour, and found Lord Cretolius and Selim at the ruined tomb of king Icarus, the rest of the emirs and nobles having gone down into the city, where a council was to be held, followed by a feast of rejoicing at the defeat of Hafed. The greetings which passed between the noble and his daughter were affectionate, and he professed himself ready to do anything to evince his gratitude to D'Arville, who had saved her from the scimitar of the Moslem, bidding him ask aught he would, and it should be granted.

Selim also pressed forward, and taking the hand of the blushing Ida, raised it to his lips. Everard frowned when he saw his sister did not withdraw her hand from that of the prince, and Lord Cretolius looked grave, but in the eyes of the knight a roguish look rested, as he said:

'My Lord Cretolius, I have a boon to ask from

yourself and Baron Everard; I would seek to be rewarded for any services I have performed, by—but I am afraid you will not grant my request.'

'It will give me great happiness to accede to your wishes, noble knight,' said Everard, 'whatever they may be.'

'And I can do no more than repeat what my son has said,' echoed Lord Cretolius, 'and bid you ask fearlessly.'

'I thank you, but first I should be pleased to hear the story of your fair daughter's adventures;' said the knight, who continued, turning to the lady, 'we have heard from the Baron De Montfort the history of your abduction, and the massacre of your followers in the ruined convent of the Euphrates, with his unavailing pursuit of the spoilers. Beauteous Ida, would it be asking too much to desire the story of your further adventures?'

After some hesitation, the lady was induced to comply with the knight's request, and the party were soon listening eagerly to her tale. Her voice was low, and they were necessitated to gather closely to hear, so that the arm of Selim almost touched her, and his eyes were fastened on her lips, or roved over her features with a passionate expression. On the other side, opposite Selim, stood the knight, whose interest in the story seemed to be eclipsed by his amusement at the unconscious portrayal of love in the eyes of Selim. The lady said:

'On awaking from the fainting state into which the fearful scene in the convent had thrown me—I mean the massacre of my escort, I found myself borne rapidly along, in front of one of the robbers, on the

back of a swift steed, the rest of the band riding behind us. From the exclamations of the chief, whom the rest addressed as Kasid, I learned that a large body of horsemen were in close pursuit, and consequently that he should be compelled to travel northward, instead of taking the direct route to Palmyra, as they had intended, for the purpose of delivering me into the hands of king Iscora.

‘They did not stop till late at night, the hoofs of their horses rattled over dry leaves, and the branches overhead hid the sky almost from view, so thickly did the trees of the forest, in which we now were, cluster together. Here a bed of moss was made for me, beside a huge rock, and upon the moss, garments were spread, to protect me from the damp. They offered me food, but I could not eat, and laid down upon my rude couch, thinking for a long time of my strange situation, and weeping at my bitter fate. At last, fatigued by the travel of the day, and wearied with my thoughts, I dropped asleep, the robbers being gathered in a circle around to ensure my safety.

‘At dawn I awoke, and found them already astir. Ere long, scouts who had been sent out returned, and gave information that the pursuers were no longer in sight; whereupon the chief gave orders to mount, and issuing from the forest, directed his course westward, in order to reach the road among the mountains, which leads down to our northern-gate. Near noon of the next day we reached the foot of the range, and commenced our ascent, but here we were suddenly surrounded by thousands of Turcoman warriors, and among them I caught sight of Hafed at the instant his eye fell upon me.

‘Springing forward, he caused me to be taken from my captors, and then inquired of the chief who he was. The latter replied that he was emir of a tribe beyond the Euphrates, and had just returned from a plundering expedition in the neighborhood of Palmyra. Hafed, satisfied with this explanation, was about to permit him to depart, when a young Turcoman chief rode up, and seeing the robber, cried out: “It is the robber Kasid, the renegade wretch of a Saracen, who slew my father in cold blood for crossing him in some of his desperate plans. By the beard of Mahomet, dog, demon, I will have thy life.” The next minute, the young warrior’s scimitar passed through Kasid’s neck.

‘This was the signal for the destruction of the robber-band, whose deeds, it seemed, were known to the tribes, from his desperate incursions into their caravans and travelling parties. My situation, I soon found, was not much changed for the better, as the prince Hafed became very insolent in his attentions, and each day I feared he would commit some act of violence. Two days after, we arrived before Palmyra, and his eager siege of our city left him no time to renew his persecutions; but before he commenced the first attack he gave me in charge of a dozen of his guards, and after consoling me with the assurance that when he had killed every Palmyrene he could take, and burnt the city, he would show me that it was vain to resist his charms and oppose his suit, and that in spite of my repugnance I should be the queen of his harem.’

‘I procured a dagger, and placed it in my bosom, resolved that he should perish beneath the arm of insulted virtue, should he persist in his villany; but for

four days I remained in a state of suspense, and knew nothing of what was going on, till I saw the Moslem leaving their tents on the summit of this mountain, and marching away this morning with their whole force. Several hours elapsed, and then my guards suddenly carried me down the side of the mountain. Looking over the shoulder of him who carried me, I saw the blue plumes of the house of Cretolius, and the dark armor of the knights pursuing us. The rest you know, and how D'Arville killed the wretch who was about to cut my head off.'

'As Mahomet is my guide, I am rejoiced that his plans have been foiled. O, had I but slain him long since, these events would not have occurred, and my noble parent would still have lived,' said prince Selim.

'And had I but killed him when I struck him from his saddle in the street of palms, it would have been a happy blow, and have saved many lives,' responded D'Arville.

'Nay, noble sirs,' said Ida, 'the ways of Providence are inscrutable, and He who reigns on high, turneth the works of evil men to the blessings of the good. Everything was better as it had been, for were it otherwise, greater evils might have happened.'

'You are right, my fair daughter,' replied Lord Cretolius; and then, turning to the knight—'Brave D'Arville, you said that when Ida's story was finished, you would ask of us a boon in return for the inestimable services you have rendered us? I will grant any request, even if you seek the hand of Ida.'

'You have said rightly, my lord, I do seek the hand of Ida,' said D'Arville.

'Here then is your bride; take her, and may Heaven

‘bless you both,’ said Lord Cretolius, as he attempted to place the lady’s hand in that of the knight, but she drew back suddenly, saying, in a tone of heartfelt anguish :

‘No, no, no, I cannot, I cannot ; O, sir knight, take pity on me ; do not, my father, ask me to sacrifice myself to one, when I love another.’

‘You love another !’ echoed Everard, ‘and whom ?’

‘I love—I love—’ Ida stopped abruptly, afraid to proceed.

‘Do not distress yourself, gentle Ida—nor you, noble Selim, look not so fierce ; for, as St. John is my patron, I would not interfere to prevent your happiness,’ said D’Arville. ‘My Lord Cretolius, I ask not her hand for myself, but I pray thee let my service prevail in favor of a friend, who hath done double service—give your daughter to him she loves—to Selim.’

‘To Selim ! never, never ! sooner would I see her in the—’

‘Cease, Lord Cretolius, and think. Had it not been for the prince, where now would have been your fair city ? Where its noble inhabitants ? Where yourself ?’

‘I care not for that ; I will never give my daughter to one who will for a time enjoy her love, and then throw her aside, broken-hearted, to mourn her blighted hopes among the cast-off beauties of a Moslem harem, I will never—’

‘My lord, I have something to tell you and Everard on that subject ; for the prince hath confided in me the story of his love, and revealed to me his determinations. Come aside with me, and I will tell you what will astonish you. Come, if you have any gratitude towards *me at all.*’

D'Arville, having said this, led the reluctant noble and Everard a short distance down the side of the hill, earnestly conversing with them. Selim and the Lady Ida were thus left alone, and when an intervening clump of palm trees hid the knight and his companions from view, the prince turned his eyes towards the maiden, and gazed earnestly upon her blushing cheek, and embarrassed countenance. Once she raised her gentle eyes, but quickly dropped them again.

The prince sprang forward, and throwing himself at her feet, took her hand. She did not withdraw it, and he covered it with ardent kisses. The events of the past few weeks had changed her feelings, and she no longer looked with fear upon the scarlet dress, which had once been the terror of her people.

‘Ida, Ida, I will not repeat again the story of my fondness, for you know well that I love you. But I would tell you of my resolution. I would speak of the change that has come over my heart, and over my affairs,—and did you not bid me hope when last we met in the hall of De Montfort? Did you not bid me hope that through some change I might win your hand? Tell me, will you not be mine?’

‘I know not what to say—I—you remember what I told you, respecting my ideas of the treatment due to woman, and my dislike of the Moslem customs,’ said Ida, mournfully.

‘Ida, dear Ida, speak not so sorrowfully. I can quiet such fears, for I tell you truly, as I adore Allah, it is the truth, that I have determined, for your dear sake, never to woo another, never to fold another in my arms if you will be mine. I will adhere to the custom of the Frank; I will be governed as far as you are

concerned, by the laws of your own land. My own love, I will swear this, with every solemn oath the sons of Turcomania know. I will never, never think of another, for your virtue and innocence have power to sway my heart, even though beauty should be lost; but when to these traits of character, sufficient in themselves to win my affection, you add the most excelling loveliness, I feel that life without thee would be a living death. Will you, will you not be mine?

‘Selim, how am I to know you will do as you have said? Will you think as much of me when years have passed, as now? And will you not, after we are married, when you think yourself secure of me, will you not treat me less kindly, and perhaps break the resolutions you say you have just formed?’

‘O, Ida, do not, do not doubt me thus. I love thee dearly, and will love thee forever, while my life is left me. Dear Ida, can you not trust one who loves you, and one you love?’ said Selim.

‘Yes, Selim, I can trust you; I believe you love me, and I am ready to resign my happiness into your care when you have promised these things, for I am sure that you will be faithful to me. I will trust you, and be—be yours.’

Ida’s concluding words were uttered in a whisper, and the happy Selim caught her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers. His happiness was too great for words, and it seemed like a dream. Suddenly a voice, the laughing voice of Everard, startled him:

‘Noble prince, you are welcome to her, but you have not stopped to hear the sequel of the knight’s conversation with us, ere you pressed your suit, and when you have made the vows of which D’Arville spoke,

when he just informed us of your intentions, you may wed her as soon as she likes ; say you not so, my father ?

‘ Yes, and happy am I to reward the deliverer of Palmyra, and the friend of the knight, with this inestimable treasure, this little hand which I hold in mine,’ said Lord Cretolius. ‘ And you may thank the warm intercessions of your brave friend D’Arville, and his earnest solicitations, for this happiness, for he offers his honor as a guarantee for the truth of your promises.’

‘ And as Allah is my guide,’ replied the prince, ‘ his honor will I hold as my own, and his guarantee shall never be forfeited. Noble D’Arville, I will never forget your kindness, and when my happiness is completed, I hope to be able to render yours as perfect as I know mine will be. I have a surprise in store for you which you little expect. When, noble lord, when will you give me the lovely one I seek ?’

‘ When you have taken the vows you have promised ; a few days will suffice to make every preparation. But you must remember, that you should never have her, were it not that your general reputation for virtue and honor is such as leaves no doubt in my mind that you will adhere to your resolutions. Come, now, and let us return into the city, for the king being dead, there will doubtless be some difficulty in the selection of another.’

The party now mounted their steeds, and took their way to the road, adown which they were soon moving, Lord Cretolius and the knight in advance, while behind them rode Everard and Selim on either side of Ida. Everard was the only one to speak, the lovers being too much engaged in happy thoughts to pay attention to outward events.

In the battles which had lately occurred, not only the king had perished, but his brother the duke Cestalius, and four other lords were numbered with the slain, and none of the males of their houses being left, it became necessary for the senators and barons to choose a monarch from their own number. The discussion on the subject now ran pretty high, not only among the nobles, but all classes of the people, and the two who seemed most in favor were Lords Morden and Cretolius. The assembly of senators were called together, and the party of friends from the side of the hill, arrived just in time to hear the call of the heralds. Leaving the rescued Lady Ida in the palace of her father, among the maidens who were rejoiced to see her, they took their way to the imperial palace, and entered the senate-chamber, from which the corpses of those who fell in the civil contest had been removed, though there were still stains of blood upon the floor.

After a long debate, the assembly decided in favor of Lord Morden; five of the twenty-one nobles, and sixteen of the hundred barons were dead, and of the hundred senators left, forty decided in favor of Lord Morden, thirty in favor of Cretolius, fifteen for Lord Sicinius, and the rest were divided. This decision being made, Lord Morden rose:

‘My lords, I am an old man, and will soon drop into the grave, and then you will find it necessary to make another choice, for as you know, I have no heirs. I am the last of my race. To you who have honored me by thinking me worthy of the Palmyrene crown, I return my warmest thanks, while I refuse the gift which others covet, and I beg of you, as the greatest favor you could confer on me, to transfer your influ-

ence to the house of Cretolius. I do not wish the cares of government—'

'Nay, my lord Morden, I cannot agree with you,' replied Lord Cretolius. 'I will never consent to take the place which of right belongs to you, never. Therefore, believe me, when I tell you that I will not now accept the crown; by the banner of my house, I swear it.'

'You will not. Hear me; I also swear never to wear the crown. Even should I take it, the cares of government would soon prostrate me. Therefore, friends of Cretolius and Morden, let me recommend to you, as a fitting ruler—and I pray you arise instantly, whoever is in favor of the one I propose—I recommend the son of Lord Cretolius, Baron Everard.'

Sixty of those present instantly arose, and after a long discussion, it was decided that Everard should be king, and the Lords Cretolius, Morden, and Sicinius, a council to advise and direct him, as his ministers. The coronation ceremony was ordered to take place in a week, as in the present state of affairs it was inexpedient to leave the realm without a monarch, for the usual period of mourning—a year—his seal, according to the laws of Palmyra, not being permitted to be used by any substitute.

And now, without the city, the people were busy in burying the bodies of those who had fallen in the various conflicts, and removing the traces of battle from the palace of the late king, and the adjacent streets. The corpse of Iscora was taken from the wall, and laid in state in the senate-chamber of the palace, which was hung with black,

Two days after, with martial music, and reversed arms, ten thousand Palmyrenes marched slowly through the street of palaces. Each banner was furled, and every plume tipped with black muslin of Stamboul. In the midst of this array moved a ponderous car, drawn by sixty black horses, surrounded by the nobles of the realm, and their kindred, on magnificent chargers, from each of whose helmets depended streamers of black muslin, and their sheathed scimitars were wreathed with the same fabric. Upon the car rested a marble coffin containing the body of Iscora.

Slowly and solemnly they passed along the street of palaces, and turning into the street of palms proceeded towards the western gate. Within the walls two hundred thousand men, women and children had assembled along the line of route, to witness the mournful procession, and as it passed through the gate, it entered a double line of the Moslem, whom the prince had thus drawn up in honor to his new allies.

Ascending the hill, the cortege after a while reached the spot near its summit, at which the tomb of the monarch had been erected, as was usual, some years before, and the coffin was raised from the car, and placed within the entrance. When all the troops composing the escort had passed in front, and the appropriate ceremonies had been performed, at a signal every helmet was removed from the heads of the soldiery, even the prince Selim, who had followed in the train, doing the same, and the marble coffin was deposited in the vault, the door of which was closed.

The hundred thousand human beings who had gathered from the city and the Moslem camp turned away

from the solemn spot, and as they took their way down the hill, gazed in admiration on the beautiful scene before them.

Ere long no living soul remained near the tomb, and king Iscora was left alone in the silent sleep of death.

CHAPTER XIX.

Conclusion. Happiness triumphant.

GLORIOUS was the day that now dawned upon Palmyra ; the sun was not too warm, and the soft breezes from the mountains sighed sweetly among the lofty branches of the countless trees in the palace gardens, and fanned the cheeks and fluttered the drapery of thousands of the fair, while innumerable plumes, of every hue and color, floated beneath the banners of twenty noble houses.

Within the vast area of the palace gardens were congregated the beauty and manhood of Palmyra, to witness the ceremonies attendant on a royal coronation, and the two hundred thousand present, among whom the scarlet-dressed sons of Ben Istam were conspicuous, waited impatiently the arrival of the expected cortege. Groups were gathered here and there beneath palm trees, conversing on the astonishing changes which three weeks had witnessed, and the variety of costumes made the scene beautiful in the extreme ; for beside the dark armor of the knights of St. John, appeared the gay robes of the Turcoman, or the green

uniforms of De Montfort's troop, and mingling with these grim warriors were the differently clad retainers of the nobles of Palmyra, and their tastily arrayed wives and daughters.

At last the sound of martial music broke on the ears of the assembled multitudes, and through the gates appeared the van of the cortege, Lord Morden's chosen chevaliers. Passing on, they made the circuit of the gardens, the crowds of spectators pressing around the line of march, to catch a glimpse of their future monarch, Everard, who rode in the midst of the nobles and barons of the realm, escorted by the blue-plumed legion of Cretolius.

Loudly rang the cries of the people, as the party paused before the magnificent throne, placed on a vast balcony erected for the purpose, on an elevated position against the palace, whence all could see the ceremony. Dismounting, the party or leaders ascended, and as the herald of the king raised his trumpet to his lips, silence fell upon all, and every busy tongue was stilled.

'Hear ye, one and all, Palmyra's sons, hear! It has been decided, by the senators of the realm, in council convened; that as king Iscora hath passed from earth, and this state is without a legal head in these troubled times, therefore that it were better that we have a ruler, The choice, in solemn conclave, hath fallen upon Everard, son of Lord Cretolius. Keep silence, then, and bear witness to the acts this day performed.'

The men of piety, the ministers of the church, advanced, and performed their solemn vocations. These being concluded, the baron Everard was led to the throne, and while the nobles, with naked scimitars,

stood around, the bishop of Palmyra placed upon his head the crown of the realm ; the air rang with shouts of ' A thousand years to our youthful ruler ! ' ' Hail to Everard, king of Palmyra ! ' and the waving of ladies' kerchiefs seemed like countless doves of merry white settling down upon the gardens.

One by one the nobles stood before the throne, and giving their weapons to the new monarch, pressed their lips to the blade, and while he held the hilt, vowed allegiance to his rule, swearing to maintain his righteous government. Lastily, the guests, D'Arville, De Montfort, and Selim, followed by the seven emirs of the Turcoman army, and the chief commanders of the different divisions of the Palmyrene legions and their pretors, greeted King Everard, and wished him a prosperous and happy reign.

The monarch and his suite then withdrew and entered the palace to partake of the luxuries provided for the occasion, and while coin of small value were scattered freely among the people, they slowly dispersed to their homes.

* * * * *

Again within the royal hall of Palmyra resounded the dulcet notes of music, and again the thousand burners that illumined the magnificent scene, threw their light on sparkling jewels and gleaming arms. A hundred nobles were there in their rich costumes, and all the higher families of the realm had sent their representatives. Beauty again ruled the hour, and bright eyes bewitched adoring suitors' hearts.

But not as before did they assemble, merely to pass a pleasant evening. The noble Selim had taken the prescribed vows to adhere to the customs of the Chris-

tian in respect to the marriage laws, and now, at the foot of the throne on which sat King Everard, stood the bishop of Palmyra, gazing upon the eager countenance of the Turcoman prince. Advancing from the group of nobles, while the expectant throng of the fair and brave stood around, Lord Cretolius, holding the hand of the blushing Ida in his, at a sign from the bishop spoke :

‘ Selim, prince of the tribe of Ben Istam, confiding in the promises you have made, and accepting the guarantee for your honorable performance of them offered by the noble Knight of the Silver Cross here beside me, I am about to surrender into your keeping the dearest jewel of my heart, my gentle daughter Ida, the pride and joy of the ancient house of Cretolius. That she loves you truly, I know, but whether she loves too well, your future conduct will prove ; that you love her has been evinced by your generous conduct, and the course of feeling that has changed a dreaded foe to a trusted friend and benefactor, and reconciled two nations long at enmity. Take her, and may you pass with her a life of peace and happiness.’

The noble placed her hand in that of Selim, who, gazing on her fondly, imprinted a kiss on her lips, and replied :

‘ Lord Cretolius, I accept this dear hand, and as Allah is my guide, I will protect my sweet Ida from every danger, and having the inestimable treasure of a loving heart, that priceless gem, a woman’s pure devotion, I shall never stray from her side to seek another. You have addressed me as Selim, prince of Ben Istam, but here, in the presence of the seven great emirs of Turcomania, of the hundred tribes of the Seljukides, and

of the assembled noblesse of the realm, let it be known, that by the voices of the Turkish chieftains, I am no longer Selim, prince of a single tribe, but Othman Selim, founder and sultan of the Turkish empire. Let those who own my sway salute their sovereign !'

An hundred and fifty voices pealed forth the cry, 'Hail to Othman I, sultan of Iconium and Turcomania !' and the turbans of a hundred and fifty chieftains were thrown upon the floor, at the feet of the new emperor. The bridal ceremony was then performed, and at its conclusion, the chieftains again shouted, in concert with all present :

'Hail to Ida, the peerless sultana of the Othman Empire !'

The sultan led his bride to the group of noble maidens, who attended as bridesmaids, and returning to the foot of the throne, addressed the assembled noblesse :

'King and nobles of Palmyra, and you my chieftains, I pray you give heed to the tale I shall relate, for to it will come a thrilling sequel. My father on his death-bed told me the story, and gave in my charge the one whom I shall soon introduce to you. His tale was thus :

'Long years ago, a troop of our tribe, flying from a fierce incursion of a dreaded foe, came southward, and for a long time were absent. The third week after their departure they returned, one half their number having perished during their absence, bringing with them a number of female prisoners, and a small quantity of spoil. My father, in looking over their captives, had his heart touched by the tears of a beautiful woman, and the innocence of a lovely little girl whom she had folded to her bosom.

‘On inquiring into their history, he resolved to purchase them, and as his favorite sultana had just lost, by death, a daughter of the same age, the little captive was given to her as a consolation, and brought up in the harem, her mother being allowed to have the care of her education. My father was a man of warm feelings, as many of you know, and contrary to our usual custom, permitted the parent to train her in the faith of her Christian fathers.

‘She was brought up in the harem of the princess Azalie, to whom she was more than a sister. My father, in dying, gave her in my charge, and told me the name of her parent, which was Azilla. The gallant knight D’Arville, as you know, vowed to restore the wife and daughter of the maniac, Marontius, to him, and now I am ready to reward the knight for his services to me ; for it was he who brought to light the assassins of my lamented father, it was he who traced the origin of the crime to my brother Hased, and he it was, who, in the late battle, smote the parricide from his horse, and sent his guilty soul to Eblis.

‘And now, brave D’Arville, I will give you the pleasure I promised. One of those Saracen maidens yonder, is the daughter of Marontius, and her mother, Azilla, is the dame who now advances.’

As the sultan spoke, a veiled lady approached, and gave her hand to the knight. At the same moment Selim Othman took the hand of one of a group of maidens, who stood aside, all veiled, and robed alike in plain costumes, and placed her beside the veiled lady.

‘Now, I thank heaven,’ cried D’Arville, ‘that my adventure hath terminated thus successfully. I am rejoiced that now I shall be able to restore the lady and

her daughter to the bereaved parent and husband, and for this moment of success, as St. John is my guide, I would relinquish the honors of knighthood. But two things are now necessary to make my happiness complete, one is the presence of Marontius, and the other—'

'Then, by the beard of Mahomet,' cried Selim, 'I can remove one cause of your unhappiness, for as I have prepared this surprise for you, I have also taken care that it shall have a fitting conclusion. Guards! open, and admit him whom I gave into your charge a few hours since!'

At this mandate, a number of retainers of the house of Cretolius, who stood before a side door, opened it, and the maniac, Marontius, bounded to the open space before the throne, in the sight of all the wondering assembly. In place of the armor which he wore a week before, ~~or the~~ skin of a wild beast wherewith he was wont to cover himself, appeared a neat dress of fine stuff; his face, which for fifteen years had not been touched by aught save the tempests of winter, was clean; his beard and hair had been partly shorn, so that D'Arville was hardly able to distinguish, in the noble form before him, the savage giant who dragged him from his horse, on the moonlit night when Palmyra first met his sight; and he overtook Lord Cretolius in the western road.

'Where are they,' cried Marontius, 'where are they, O tell me, where? They told me, who brought me hither, they told me, who placed upon me these garments, and clipped the locks from my head, they told me I should see them again! O, in pity, where is my Azilla, where is she? Will no one tell me? Where is the wife of my heart? And you, noble

knight, they said you would bring her back to me, will you also keep silence ? And these Saracens, they said, had brought her to you ! O, I have cursed their race, I have sworn to bathe my hands in their blood ; but now they have returned her hither, and I will bless them, I will—O, tell me, where is she ? Lady, lady,’ continued he, addressing the trembling dame who stood beside D’Arville, ‘you weep, you sob—do you know where she is ? Ha ! great Heaven ! that sigh, that sigh, I remember it of old ! It was so Azilla sighed when her cruel father bade us meet no more ! Lady, in mercy lift the veil, and—’

‘Artana, my early love,’ cried the lady, tearing off her veil, and rushing into the arms of Marontius, ‘my long-parted husband, my own, my own !’

One moment the maniac gazed on the face of his Azilla, and then, with one wild shriek of mingled emotion, fell back senseless upon the floor.

‘My husband, awake from your trance—you are not dead. O, my heart, and is this to be the fate of him who—is this to be the end of all my hopes ? O, bitter disappointment ! let me die with him I love !’

The Lady Azilla threw herself on the form of Marontius, and sobbed as if her heart would break. The veiled maiden who stood near D’Arville, knelt beside the Lady Azilla, and as their tears together flowed, there was scarcely a dry eye in the hall.

‘Mother, dear mother, weep not ! I am left to thee ! See, he is not dead, for the blood beats in his temples, and his bosom heaveth ! O, sirs, lift him gently,’ continued she, to those who raised him partly from the floor, ‘or he may yet perish !’

Two of the guards held his head and shoulders on

their knees, and an anxious group gathered around to witness the effect of the attempts made to revive Marontius. The lady and the maiden knelt with clasped hands, gazing into the face of the prostrate man, and over the snowy shoulders of the latter fell her glossy ringlets, which had escaped from their confinement, for she had torn her veil aside that she might the better look at him whom she now knew was her father.

The astonished D'Arville had no eyes for any but her, for he saw that the maiden was no other than the Turcoman princess, Azalie. The resemblance between her name and that of her mother, Azilla, now struck him forcibly, and he wondered how it was he had not before suspected the truth.

'Raise him, and bear him to the ante-room,' said King Everard, 'and you, fair lady, I pray you accompany him, and see if your presence will aid in his restoration. Let every care be taken of him, and all proper means be used for his restoration.'

The attendants lifted the prostrate form from the floor, and conveyed him to a couch in the ante-room, followed by the Lady Azilla and the princess Azalie, with their maidens and grooms. The door of the ante-room was shut, and Marontius was left in care of his wife and child.

* * * * *

'Where is the noble chevalier who restored to me my wife and daughter? Let me see him, that I may call down upon his head happiness, and rejoice in showering upon him my gratitude for the benefits he has conferred on me!'

All within the festive hall turned in surprise, and

looked in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and there, just appearing through the open door of the ante-room, they saw the form of him whom they had seen carried out insensible an hour before. Astonishment seized on all, and they gazed in wonder, half-doubting whether this appearance of sanity was not transitory, for no longer in the maniac's eye gleamed the glare of madness, but in its place appeared the calm glance of reason, and as he strode up the hall they saw that he no longer moved with wild rapidity, but stepped firmly in the steadiness of self-possession.

'Great Heaven,' cried the knight, 'and have my efforts been thus blessed in the end! O, I thank thee, great Power above, that thou hast nerved my heart to prosecute my first intention, and through thy providence hath brought my vow to a successful issue. I thank thee that I have thus been enabled to rescue a soul from the dark oblivion of despairing madness, and restore to their homes the fair ones who were torn thence by violence.'

'And is it you, noble knight, is it you to whom I am indebted for these blessings? How, O, how can I ever repay you?'

As the lord of Marontius and Artanius said this he took the hand of D'Arville, and gazed into his eyes with grateful look, while the Lady Azilla, throwing herself on the bosom of the knight, cried:

'Brave champion of the oppressed, chivalric knight, to Heaven I return my thanks, that giveth me the opportunity to express to you the fervent gratitude I feel. You have restored me to the dear husband of my youth, you have given a father back to the orphaned daughter, and re-united the sweet ties which bound together a family. O, I think that nothing I can

give would be too great a sacrifice for me, that I might recompense your kindness. Will you not give us an opportunity of showing our gratitude, will you not allow us to repay some of that debt we owe you, and return the obligations you have showered upon my husband, my daughter, and myself ?

‘Yes, brave D’Arville, for they tell me that is your name,’ said Marontius, ‘ask of me a boon, I pray you, and I care not what you seek, your request shall be granted to the uttermost that lies in my power.’

The knight’s heart beat wildly with emotion, and the gush of his feelings so overpowered him, that he found himself unable to articulate a single sentence. His tearful eye, however, rested wistfully upon the form of the timid Azalie, who stood a few feet distant, trembling, and though her veil hid from sight her features, yet D’Arville imagined he could divine her thoughts. As soon as he could speak, he said :

‘There is but one boon I ask of you, and that, at this moment of restoration, it would be cruel to take. Yet my own happiness demands that I should speak, for I love with the whole strength of my heart, and without this dear being to share my joys, I will be forever joyless; without the happiness of her dear presence, I will be forever unhappy.’

As the knight said this, he advanced and took the hand of Azalie, pressing it respectfully to his lips.

‘This is happiness upon happiness,’ said Marontius; ‘for I shall be proud to own as a son-in-law one who has so gallantly conducted himself; and whose heart throbs with such generosity and kindness. O, what pleasure is mine. It seems as if Heaven had ordained that the joy of a life should be crowded into this single evening, to recompense me for the bereavement and

desolation of spirit which have been my lot for fifteen long years—for this they tell me hath been the period during which my mind hath wandered. Take her, brave D'Arville, and through many a passing year mayst thou have continually increasing happiness. Heaven's blessing rest upon you both.'

Again before the royal throne gathered a bridal party; the groom was the gallant Knight of the Silver Cross, the bride, the lovely Azalie. At the side of the former stood the sultan Othman, as groomsman, attended by three of his princes, and a number of young Palmyrene nobles; beside Azalie was her bridesmaid, Othman's beautiful spouse, the peerless Ida, and in her suite a train of noble maidens.

The lord of Marontius and Artanius gave away the bride with a fitting address, in the presence of the vast assemblage of Turcoman emirs, and princes, and Palmyrene nobles, and the bishop performed the pleasing service. On the throne sat King Everard in his robes of state, and in his right hand rested the sceptre of the realm, while on either side stood Lords Cretolius, Morden, Sicinius, and three other aged nobles, in the capacity of ministers.

'My own dear Azalie, this hand which you have now given me, and the heart which was long since mine, are more than sufficient to repay me for any dangers I may have incurred in the fulfilment of my vow. Heaven and St. John, I am but too happy, and since you desire it, I will henceforth devote myself to the joyful task of securing your felicity.'

As the knight said this, he saluted his beautiful wife, who, looking timidly up into his face, said:

'Did I not tell you, in the palace of Iconium, that when you had restored the lost Azilla to her husband,

you should be rewarded with the hand of Azalie, the princess of Ben Istam ! Little thought you, then, my own brave husband, that Azilla was watching your movements there, and that the page who whispered to you was no other than herself in disguise ; and little did you imagine when you wooed on the eve the eunuchs took you prisoner, that your Azalie was the daughter of Azilla.'

King Everard rose from his throne, and descending, bade the knight kneel ; touching the lips of D'Arville with his sceptre, he said :

' Arise, Percy D'Arville, Knight of the Silver Cross, arise, no longer a baronet, but as Percy, Lord D'Arville, and Duke of the Realm. 'That thou mayest not lack for power to sustain thy lordly name, we confer on thee, with the approbation of our council, the dukedom of the late Duke Cestalius, and give to thee the command of the newly raised imperial legion !'

Loud cries of applause rent the air, and bright eyes sparkled with pleasure. Around Lord Percy D'Arville crowded the nobles of Palmyra to offer him the hand of fellowship, and to welcome him as one of their number, while the Lady Azalie and the Sultana Ida retired to the side of the hall to receive the greetings of Palmyra's fair daughters.

THE END.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

The foregoing is from THE FLAG OF OUR UNION, and is one only of the many entertaining Tales which are published in its columns. The Flag has acquired a circulation larger than any other publication in the country, sustains a character of great literary excellence and is eagerly welcomed by its hundred thousand readers.





